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THE MONTH

MARCH 1949

MR. T. S. ELIOT ON THE MEANING
OF CULTURE

Christopher Dawson

ELECTED SILENCE

Thomas Merton

THE PRE-RAPHAELITES AND OURSELVES

Elizabeth Rothenstein

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THE MONTH

VOL. I. No. 3

NEW SERIES

MARCH 1949

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News about Books

IT is a long time ago since THE GREEN CARNATION made its first appearance in 1895 under the imprint of Mr. William Heinemann, who had "commenced publisher" only a few years earlier. It came out anonymously, and there was much speculation as to the authorship of this entertaining skit on the so-called Aesthetic Movement, with its thinly disguised portraits of the principal exponents. It was withdrawn from circulation the following year, for reasons which the author, Mr. Robert Hichens, explains in the course of an Introduction which he has written specially for this, the first, reprint since its suppression. The book will appear immediately, price 8s. 6d.

A WORK which has survived the outbreak of peace is Richard Le Gallienne's *FROM A PARIS GARRET* (21s.) with its attractive colour-plates, and with an Introduction by Grant Richards. The fourth printing is now available again after a regrettably prolonged absence from the shops. Any reader who does not know this discursive and informative book about the French capital has no further excuse for neglecting it.

THE name of St. John Hankin, dramatist in the Sheridan-Congreve-Wilde tradition, is little known to-day, yet his "theatre" is worthy of attention. We have reprinted *THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL* (Cloth 6s., Paper 4s.), perhaps the best of his comedies, with an Introduction by St. John Ervine, in which he discusses the dramatist's work in relation to that of his contemporaries. "All Hankin's plays are remarkably equal in merits: he had no failures," is the emphatic statement of Mr. Bernard Shaw.

THE Unicorn Press edition of the works of Oscar Wilde will be added *LORD ARTHUR SAVILE'S CRIME* and other Stories (8s. 6d.), and included in the volume is the less well-known "Portrait of Mr. W. H." Many people consider that this ingenious story contains the final solution of the enigma of Shakespeare's Sonnets.

DThis news-letter is issued by The Richards Press Ltd. and The Unicorn Press, whose address is No. 8 Charles II Street, St. James's Square, London, S.W.1, WHI 4239.

MR. T. S. ELIOT ON THE MEANING OF CULTURE¹

By
CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

IT is eighty years ago since Matthew Arnold first took up the cudgels in defence of culture against the Philistines as represented by John Bright and Frederic Harrison and the *Daily Telegraph*. At that date the very word was unfamiliar, and when John Bright described it as "a smattering of two dead languages" he was probably expressing the views of the average Englishman. To-day the situation has entirely changed. The word is not only accepted; it has been adopted by the planners and the politicians, and has become part of the international language or jargon of propaganda and ideological controversy. Consequently when Mr. Eliot comes forward in defence of culture, his first task is to rescue the word from the bad company into which it has fallen, to define its proper limits and to restore its intellectual respectability and integrity. In this he stands nearer to Matthew Arnold than he would perhaps be willing to admit. For, like Arnold, he is defending what are commonly termed the "spiritual values" of our Western tradition against degradation and debasement; and Matthew Arnold's Philistines who denied the value of culture are represented to-day by Mr. Eliot's antagonists who use the word "culture" as a convenient omnibus expression to cover all the subordinate non-economic social activities which have to be included in their organization of a planned society.

It is true that Mr. Eliot is no longer using the word in Matthew Arnold's sense. For while the latter was concerned only to maintain and extend its traditional classical sense as the harmonious development of human nature by the cultivation of the mind, the former has adopted the modern sociological concept of culture as a way of life common to a particular people and based on a

¹ *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. By T. S. Eliot. (Faber & Faber, 10s. 6d.)

social tradition which is embodied in its institutions, its literature and its art. Now I entirely agree with Mr. Eliot in this definition, which is in fact my own, and I believe that this use of the word has become indispensable to the historian and the sociologist. Nevertheless our acceptance of this definition should not blind us to the fact that the older classical and humanist conception of culture still prevails in English usage. In fact, the modern degradation of the word by politicians and publicists of which Mr. Eliot rightly complains is a degradation of the old aristocratic and individualist ideal of literary culture, and has little or nothing to do with the modern sociological concept of culture as the principle of social unity and continuity which has not yet established its place in current usage.

The resultant confusion is to be seen in the most unlikely quarters, for instance among the communists who one might have expected to be among the first to abandon the individualist conception of culture which is so profoundly steeped in bourgeois associations. Yet when a Soviet representative to U.N.O. recently¹ objected to the return of Russian wives to Western husbands on the ground that the married woman in England was debarred from cultural activities, he did not mean that the bourgeois house-wife could not influence the common way of life owing to her low social status; he merely meant that she was so overworked that she had no time to go to the theatre or the cinema. No doubt theatre-going may be a cultural activity, just as dancing or dress-making or attending lectures may be, but how superficial and insignificant are such activities in comparison with the work of making a new family; for this is not only the life-cell of the social organism, but also the vital organ of the transmission of culture in the wider sense of the word!

The value of Mr. Eliot's approach may be seen by the way in which it directs our attention to those great primary elements of culture—family, region and religion—which tend to be ignored equally by the socialist advocates of a planned society, on the one hand, and by the surviving champions of the liberal ideal of free individual culture on the other.

He does not, however, deal as fully with the social function of the family as we might have expected, since his chapter on the

¹ Professor Alexei Pavlov in the legal committee of the United Nations, at Paris, December 8, 1948.

organic structure of culture is almost entirely concerned with the question of classes and élites. Unfortunately contemporary opinion on this subject has been so deeply affected by the economic individualism of the nineteenth century and by the Marxian ideology of class war that it is now almost impossible to restore the sociological concept of class as Mr. Eliot sees it and as it existed in the past. For even the nineteenth-century terminology of "upper," "middle" and "lower" was already economic rather than sociological in character. (It is nearly thirty years since I heard the traditional Christian English class words—"gentle and simple"—actually used by a countryman, and even then it seemed like a voice from the remote past.) It was the need for some new terminology which would do justice to the vital non-economic sociological factors that led the late Professor Karl Mannheim¹ to introduce Pareto's term "the élites" to describe the culture-creating groups, which in his view were not necessarily identical with the dominant economic class. I do not think that Mr. Eliot is altogether justified in his criticism of this descriptive method on the ground that it posits an atomic view of society. The question as Mannheim saw it is how we can make people who are actually living in an atomic state of society understand those fundamental factors of social change which are ignored by the dominant Marxian philosophy because they have a non-economic character.

But while Mannheim is primarily interested in the mechanism of social change, Mr. Eliot is concerned above all with the problem of social tradition—i.e. the maintenance and transmission of the standards of culture. This, he argues, is the function of the class, rather than the élite, for "it is the function of the class as a whole to preserve and communicate standards of *manners*—which are a vital element in group culture." At this point Mr. Eliot comes into sharp collision with the dominant ideologies not only of Marxian socialism but of his own democratic world. For the equalitarian traditions of the American and the French Revolutions have always been profoundly hostile to the idea of an organic class structure; and though American society has travelled a long way from the agrarian democracy of the early nineteenth century, it has always accepted the atomic conception of society which Mr.

¹ Cf. *Ideology and Utopia* 1936 and, above all, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, 1940.

Eliot condemns; so that the millionaires, at any rate in theory, represent an economic élite with no uniform social background rather than a governing class or an economic aristocracy. Hence when Mr. Eliot asserts his belief in a society with a class structure and a continuous gradation of cultural levels, he is stating what would have been a truism to Burke and Fitzjames Stephen, but is now dismissed without discussion as a reactionary prejudice by both the political camps into which the modern world is divided.

Nevertheless the problem is a serious one which at least deserves serious discussion. We are too apt to believe that everything would go well with the world if only we could enforce common standards by universal economic planning and some form of political world organization, and we ignore the tremendous dangers which threaten man's spiritual freedom under the impersonal tyranny of a mechanized order in which the individual is considered merely as one among the hundred million or five hundred million units which compose the modern promiscuous mass society. But no class system or stratified social structure can save us from the horrors of total planning. On the contrary, I am sure that the mechanization of society would inevitably produce a new and more exclusive system of specialized classes or castes, such as was developed in a more primitive form by the collectivism of the later Roman Empire.

Religion, not social differentiation, is the real safeguard of spiritual freedom, since it alone brings man into relation with a higher order of reality than the world of politics or even of culture and establishes the human soul on eternal foundations. This, however, does not mean that religion is alien from or indifferent to culture. No one could put the case for the unity of religion and culture more strongly than Mr. Eliot does. In fact he argues that if a culture is the way of life of a whole people, then a Christian people, which seeks to be wholly Christian and Christian all the time, must inevitably aspire to the identification of religion and culture. In other words, a culture is the incarnation of a religion: they are not two different things which may be related to one another, but different aspects of the same thing: one common life, viewed at different levels or in reference to different ends.

If this view is carried to its logical conclusion, it leads us into

considerable difficulties, as Mr. Eliot himself admits. "To reflect that from one point of view religion is culture," he writes, "and from another point of view culture is religion, can be very disturbing. To ask whether the people have not a religion already, in which Derby Day and the dog-track play their parts, is embarrassing: so is the suggestion that part of the religion of the higher ecclesiastic is gaiters and the Athenæum. It is inconvenient for Christians to find that as Christians they do not believe enough, and that on the other hand they, with everyone else, believe in too many things: yet this is a consequence of reflecting that bishops are a part of English culture, and that horses and dogs are a part of English religion."

Yet, in spite of these paradoxical consequences Mr. Eliot remains convinced that religion and culture are inseparable and that the traditional conception of a *relation* between religion and culture as two distinct realities is fundamentally erroneous and unacceptable. Yet I believe that the idea of such a relation is inseparable from the traditional Christian conception of religion and that the paradoxes that are inherent in his view are gratuitous difficulties which are due to ignoring the necessary transcendence of the religious factor. No doubt there are religions, like those of ancient Greece and Rome, which are inseparably bound up with their respective culture and are in a sense cultural products. But the higher religions, and especially Christianity, involve a certain dualism from the nature of their spiritual claims. Here the relation of religion and culture is simply the social corollary of the relation between *Faith* and *Life*.

When St. Augustine came to Kent the Jutes already possessed their common way of life and their national or tribal culture. Their conversion to Christianity certainly affected their way of life in some respects, but it did not abolish it in order to create a Christian culture *de novo*. Religion and culture were in fact two distinct traditions which were *related* to one another but never wholly identified. And the same holds good of modern society. Our religion, if we are Christians, is founded on a conscious act of faith, which may or may not be a transforming influence in our lives. But our culture is a way of life which already exists without any deliberate choice on our part, and which depends on external circumstances of place and work and language and social institutions.

Certainly religion is the great creative force in culture and almost every historic culture has been inspired and informed by some great religion. Nevertheless Religion and Culture remain essentially distinct from one another in idea, and the more religious a religion is the more does it tend to assert its "*otherness*" and its transcendence of the limits of culture. This ultimate dualism is most strongly marked in Christianity which has always placed its centre of gravity outside the present world, so that the Christian way of life is seen as that of a stranger and an exile who looks home towards the eternal city in which alone his true citizenship is to be found. This "*otherworldliness*" has often been a cause of offence to modern critics of religion who regard Christianity as a reactionary force and an obstacle to the progress of civilization. It is true that if we regard culture as the fruit of a natural process of adaptation by which society finds a way of life perfectly fitted to its natural environment, any higher religion is bound to exert a disturbing influence. Christianity brings a sword of division into human life, and closes the gate which leads back to the dream of a social Utopia and a state of natural perfection.

Nevertheless this introduction of a higher spiritual principle into man's life—this denial of the self-sufficiency and self-centredness of human life is no more opposed to the development of culture than it is to the freedom of the personality. On the contrary, the widening of man's spiritual horizon, which results from the Christian view of the world, also widens the field of culture, just as the personality of the individual is deepened and exalted by the consciousness of his spiritual destiny.

No one understands this better than Mr. Eliot, who has done so much to restore to our generation a consciousness of the high tradition of Christian culture. Indeed, his own poetic achievement is a most striking example of the way in which the Christian view of reality has enriched and deepened the inner life of our own contemporary culture. And what is here achieved in the unique personal form of poetic creation may be realized also at every level of the social process in the common life of the people as a whole. Everywhere man's way of life is capable of being guided and informed by the spirit of religious faith. But, however completely a culture may seem to be dominated by religion, there remains a fundamental dualism between the order of culture which is part of the order of nature and the principle of faith which

transcends the natural order and finds its centre outside the world of man.

It is this conception of the intervention of a transcendent divine principle in the life of man which none the less retains its roots in the earth and in the order of nature that renders the history of Christian culture so difficult to investigate and the ideal of Christian culture so hard to realize. But it is a problem that we cannot afford to ignore. In the past the problem was simplified by the existence of a common religious tradition and a common standard of literary culture which were generally accepted by Christians and educationalists. To-day these common traditions have been abandoned by the rulers of the modern State and the planners of modern society, while at the same time the latter have come to exercise a more complete control over the thought and life of the whole population than the most autocratic and authoritarian powers of the past ever possessed. In this situation the work of men like Mr. T. S. Eliot who are able to meet the planners and sociologists on their own ground without losing sight of the real spiritual issues may be of decisive importance for the future of our culture.

ELECTED SILENCE¹

By

THOMAS MERTON

Foreword by Evelyn Waugh

THIS very remarkable autobiography has, under the title of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, enjoyed prodigious success in the U.S.A. The present text has been renamed and very slightly abridged in order to adapt it to European tastes. Nothing has been cut out except certain passages which seemed to be of purely local interest. It remains essentially American. Despite a cosmopolitan childhood, "Thomas Merton"—Father Louis, as he is now named—is typical of what is newest and best in his country. Columbia not Cambridge formed his literary style. His spirituality, though French in discipline, is a flower of the Catholic life of the New World. Americans no longer become expatriates in their quest for full cultural development. They are learning to draw away from what is distracting in their own civilization while remaining in their own borders.

Here in fresh, simple, colloquial American is the record of a soul experiencing, first, disgust with the modern world, then Faith, then a clear vocation to the way in which Faith may be applied to the modern world. The word "prodigious" is used with full intent. It is a prodigy of the new spirit of the New World that this book should have been read by hundreds of thousands. For several generations American Catholics have abounded in works of corporate charity such as still flourish everywhere, and in recent years have produced such typically contemporary enterprises as Friendship House in Harlem and the House of Hospitality in Mott Street. The contemplative life has until very lately drawn few in proportion to the numbers. Now Carmelite Convents can barely cope with the press of postulants, and the Trappists are opening new houses in the deep South and in the hills of Utah. But the life of these communities is by its nature unostentatious, and *The Seven Storey Mountain* came as a

¹ Passages from the autobiography of Thomas Merton to be published shortly by Messrs. Hollis and Carter.

startling revelation to most non-Catholic Americans who were quite unaware of the existence in their midst of institutions which seemed a denial of the American "way of life." The book suddenly made remote people conscious of the warmth silently generated in these furnaces of devotion. To one observer at least it seems probable that the U.S.A. will shortly be the scene of a great monastic revival. There is an ascetic tradition deep in the American heart which has sometimes taken odd and unlovable forms. Here in the historic Rules of the Church lies its proper fulfilment.

In the natural order the modern world is rapidly being made uninhabitable by the scientists and politicians. We are back in the age of Gregory, Augustine and Boniface, and in compensation the Devil is being disarmed of many of his former enchantments. Power is all he can offer now; the temptations of wealth and elegance no longer assail us. As in the Dark Ages the cloister offers the sanest and most civilized way of life.

And in the supernatural order the times require more than a tepid and dutiful piety. Prayer must become heroic. That is the theme of this book which should take its place among the classic records of spiritual experience.

I

Murat was a wonderful place. It was deep in snow, and the houses with their snow-covered roofs relieved the grey and blue and slate-dark pattern of the buildings crowded together on the sides of three hills. The town huddled at the foot of a rock crowned by a colossal statue of the Immaculate Conception, which seemed to me, at the time, to be too big, and to bespeak too much religious enthusiasm. By now I realize that it did not indicate any religious excess at all. These people wanted to say in a very obvious way that they loved Our Lady, who should indeed be loved and revered, as a Queen of great power and a Lady of immense goodness and mercy, mighty in her intercession for us before the throne of God, tremendous in the glory of her sanctity and her fullness of grace as Mother of God. For she loves the children of God, who are born into the world with the image of God in their souls, and her powerful love is forgotten, and it is not understood, in the blindness and foolishness of the world.

However, I did not bring up the subject of Murat in order to talk about this statue, but about M. and Mme. Privat. They were the people with whom we boarded, and long before we got to Murat, when the train was climbing up the snowy valley, from Aurillac, on the other side of the Puy du Cantal, Father was telling me: "Wait until you see the Privats."

In a way, they were to be among the most remarkable people I ever knew.

The Auvergnats are, as a rule, not tall. The Privats were both of them not much taller than I was, being then twelve, but tall for my age. I suppose M. Privat was about five foot three or four, but not more. But he was tremendously broad, a man of great strength. He seemed to have no neck, but his head rose from his shoulders in a solid column of muscle and bone, and for the rest, his shadow was almost completely square. He wore a black, broad-brimmed hat, like most of the peasants of the region, and it gave his face an added solemnity when his sober and judicious eyes looked out at you peacefully from under the regular brows and that regular brim above them. These two decks, two levels of regularity, added much to the impression of solidity and immobility and impassiveness which he carried with him everywhere, whether at work or at rest.

His little wife was more like a bird, thin, serious, earnest, quick, but also full of that peacefulness and impassiveness which, as I now know, came from living close to God. She wore a funny little head-dress which I find it almost impossible to describe, except to say that it looked like a little sugar-loaf perched on top of her head, and garnished with a bit of black lace. The women of Auvergne still wear that head-dress.

It is a great pleasure for me to remember such good and kind people and to talk about them, although I no longer possess any details about them. I just remember their kindness and goodness to me, and their peacefulness and their utter simplicity. They inspired real reverence, and I think, in a way, they were certainly saints. And they were saints in that most effective and telling way: sanctified by leading ordinary lives in a completely supernatural manner, sanctified by obscurity, by usual skills, by common tasks, by routine, but skills, tasks, routine which received a supernatural form from grace within, and from the habitual union of their souls with God in deep faith and charity.

Their farms, their family, and their Church were all that occupied these good souls; and their lives were full.

Father, who thought more and more of my physical and moral health, realized what a treasure he had found in these two, and consequently Murat was more and more in his mind as a place where I should go and get healthy.

That winter, at the Lycée, I had spent several weeks in the infirmary with various fevers, and the following summer, when Father had to go to Paris, he took the opportunity to send me once again to Murat, to spend a few weeks living with the Privats, who would feed me plenty of butter and milk and would take care of me in every possible way.

Those were weeks that I shall never forget, and the more I think of them, the more I realize that I must certainly owe the Privats for more than butter and milk and good nourishing food for my body. I am indebted to them for much more than the kindness and care they showed me, the goodness and the delicate solicitude with which they treated me as their own child, yet without any assertive or natural familiarity. As a child, and since then too, I have always tended to resist any kind of a possessive affection on the part of any other human being—there has always been this profound instinct to keep clear, to keep free. And only with truly supernatural people have I ever felt really at my ease, really at peace.

That was why I was glad of the love the Privats showed me, and was ready to love them in return. It did not burn you, it did not hold you, it did not try to imprison you in demonstrations, or trap your feet in the snares of its interest.

I used to run in the woods, and climb the mountains. I went up the Plomb du Cantal, which is nothing more than a huge hill, with a boy who was, I think, the Privats' nephew. He went to a Catholic school, taught, I suppose, by priests. It had not occurred to me that every boy did not talk like the brats I knew at the Lycée. Without thinking, I let out some sort of a remark of the kind you heard all day long at Montauban, and he was offended and asked where I had picked up that kind of talk. And yet, while being ashamed of myself, I was impressed by the charitableness of his reaction. He dismissed it at once, and seemed to have forgotten all about it, and left me with the impression that he excused me on the grounds that I was English

and had used the expression without quite knowing what it meant.

After all, this going to Murat was a great grace. Did I realize it? I did not know what a grace was. And though I was impressed with the goodness of the Privats, I could not fail to realize what was its root and its foundation. And yet it never occurred to me at the time to think of being like them, of profiting in any way by their example.

I think I only talked to them once about religion. We were all sitting on the narrow balcony looking out over the valley, at the hills turning dark blue and purple in the September dusk. Somehow, something came up about Catholics and Protestants and immediately I had the sense of all the solidity and rectitude of the Privats turned against me, accusing me like the face of an impregnable fortification.

So I began to justify Protestantism, as best I could. I think they had probably said that they could not see how I managed to go on living without the faith: for there was only one Faith, one Church. So I gave them the argument that every religion was good: they all led to God, only in different ways, and every man should go according to his own conscience, and settle things according to his own private way of looking at things.

They did not answer me with any argument. They simply looked at one another and shrugged and Monsieur Privat said quietly and sadly: "*Mais c'est impossible.*"

It was a terrible, a frightening, a very humiliating thing to feel all their silence and peacefulness and strength turned against me, accusing me of being estranged from them, isolated from their security, cut off from their protection and from the strength of their inner life by my own fault, by my own wilfulness, by my own ignorance, and my uninstructed Protestant pride.

One of the humiliating things about it was that I wanted them to argue, and they despised argument. It was as if they realized, as I did not, that my attitude and my desire of argument and religious discussion implied a fundamental and utter lack of faith, and a dependence on my own lights, and attachment to my own opinion.

What is more, they seemed to realize that I did not believe in anything, and that anything I might say I believed would be only empty talk. Yet they did not give me the feeling that this was

some slight matter, something to be indulged in a child, something that could be left to work itself out in time, of its own accord. I had never met people to whom belief was a matter of such moment. And yet there was nothing they could do for me directly. But what they could do, I am sure they did, and I am glad they did it. And I thank God from the bottom of my heart that they were concerned, and so deeply and vitally concerned, at my lack of faith.

Who knows how much I owe to those two wonderful people? Anything I say about it is only a matter of guessing but, knowing their charity, it is to me a matter of moral certitude that I owe many graces to their prayers, and perhaps ultimately the grace of my conversion and even of my religious vocation. Who shall say? But one day I shall know, and it is good to be able to be confident that I will see them again and be able to thank them.

II

Oakham, Oakham! The grey murk of the winter evenings in that garret where seven or eight of us moiled around in the gaslight, among the tuck-boxes, noisy, greedy, foul-mouthed, fighting and shouting! There was one who had a ukulele which he did not know how to play. And Pop used to send me the brown rotogravure sections of the New York Sunday papers, and we would cut out the pictures of the actresses and paste them up on the walls.

And I toiled with Greek verbs. And we drank raisin wine and ate potato chips until we fell silent and sat apart, stupefied and nauseated. And under the gaslight I would write letters to Father in the hospital, letters on cream-coloured notepaper stamped with the school crest in blue.

After three months it was better. I was moved up into the Upper Fifth, and changed to a new study downstairs, with more light, though just as crowded and just as much of a mess. And we had Cicero and European history—all about the nineteenth century, with a certain amount of cold scorn poured on Pio Nono. In the English class we read *The Tempest* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* and the *Pardoner's Tale*, and Buggy Jerwood, the school chaplain, tried to teach us trigonometry. With me, he

failed. Sometimes he would try to teach us something about religion. But in this he also failed.

In any case, his religious teaching consisted mostly in more or less vague ethical remarks, an obscure mixture of ideals of English gentlemanliness and his favourite notions of personal hygiene. Everybody knew that his class was liable to degenerate into a demonstration of some practical points about rowing, with Buggy sitting on the table and showing us how to pull an oar.

There was no rowing at Oakham, since there was no water. But the chaplain had been a rowing "blue" at Cambridge in his time. He was a tall, powerful, handsome man, with hair greying at the temples, and a big English chin, and a broad, uncreased brow.

His greatest sermon was on the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians—and a wonderful chapter indeed. But his exegesis was a bit strange. However, it was typical of him and, in a way, of his whole church. "Buggy's" interpretation of the word "charity" in this passage (and in the whole Bible) was that it simply stood for "all that we mean when we call a chap a 'gentleman.'" In other words, charity meant good-sportsmanship, cricket, the decent thing, wearing the right kind of clothes, using the proper spoon, not being a cad or a bounder.

There he stood, in the plain pulpit, and raised his chin above the heads of all the rows of boys in black coats, and said: "One might go through this chapter of St. Paul and simply substitute the word 'gentleman' for 'charity' wherever it occurs. 'If I talk with the tongues of men and of angels, and be not a gentleman, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal . . . A gentleman is patient, is kind; a gentleman envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up . . . A gentleman never falleth away.' . . ."

As time went on I was to get into fierce arguments with the football captain on this subject, but that day was yet to come. As long as I was among the fourteen- and fifteen-year olds in Hodge Wing, I had to mind my behaviour with the lords of the school, or at least in their presence. We were disciplined by the constant fear of one of those pompous and ceremonious sessions of bullying, arranged with ritualistic formality, when a dozen or so culprits were summoned into one of the hollows around Brooke hill, or up the Braunston road, and beaten with sticks,

and made to sing foolish songs and to hear themselves upbraided for their moral and social defects.

When I got into the sixth form, which I did after a year, I came more directly under the influence and guidance of the new Headmaster, F. C. Doherty. He was a young man for a Headmaster, about forty, tall, with a great head of black hair, a tremendous smoker of cigarettes and a lover of Plato. Because of the cigarettes, he used to like to give his class in his own study, when he decently could, for there he could smoke one after another, while in the classrooms he could not smoke at all.

He was a broad-minded man, and I never realized how much I owed to him until I left Oakham. It was he who began, from the start, to prepare me for the university, getting me to aim at a Cambridge scholarship. And it was he who let me follow the bent of my own mind, for Modern Languages and Literature, although that meant that I spent much of my time studying alone in the library, since there was no real "Modern" course at Oakham at the time.

This was all the more generous of him for the fact that he really was very much attached to the Classics, and especially Plato, and he would have liked all of us to catch some of that infection. And yet this infection—which, in my eyes, was nothing short of deadly—was something I resisted with all my will. We were reading *The Republic* in Greek, which meant that we never got far enough into it to be able to grasp the ideas very well. Most of the time I was too helpless with the grammar and syntax to have time for any deeper difficulties.

Nevertheless, after a couple of months of it, I got to a state where phrases like "the Good, the True, and the Beautiful" filled me with a kind of suppressed indignation, because they stood for the big sin of Platonism: the reduction of all reality to the level of pure abstraction, as if concrete, individual substances had no essential reality of their own, but were only shadows of some remote, universal, ideal essence filed away in a big card-index somewhere in heaven, while the demiurges milled around the Logos piping their excitement in high, fluted, English intellectual tones. Platonism entered very much into the Headmaster's ideas of religion, which were deeply spiritual and intellectual. However, it was no easier to find out, concretely, what he

believed than it was to find out what anybody else believed in that place.

I had several different Masters in the one hour a week devoted to religious instruction (outside of the daily chapel). The first one just plodded through the third Book of Kings. The second, a tough little Yorkshireman, who had the virtue of being very definite and outspoken in everything he said, once exposed to us Descartes' proof of his own and God's existence. He told us that as far as he was concerned, that was the foundation of what religion meant to him.

As for the Headmaster, when he gave us religious instruction, as he did in my last year or so at Oakham, he talked Plato, and told me to read A. E. Taylor, which I did, but under compulsion, and taking no trouble to try and understand what I was reading.

* * *

Tom—my godfather—was to be the person I most respected and admired and consequently the one who had the greatest influence on me at this time in my life. He, too, gave me credit for being more intelligent and mature than I was, and this, of course, pleased me very much.

Life in the flat where Tom and his wife lived was very well-ordered and amusing. You got breakfast in bed, served by a French maid, on a small tray: coffee or chocolate in a tiny pot, toast or rolls, and, for me, fried eggs. After breakfast, which came in at about nine, I knew I would have to wait a little to get a bath, so I would stay in bed for an hour or so more reading a novel. Then I would get up and take my bath and get dressed and go out and look for some amusement—walk in the park, or go to a museum, or go to some gramophone shop and listen to a lot of hot records—and then buy one, to pay for the privilege of listening to all the rest. I used to go to Levy's, on the top floor of one of those big buildings in Regent Street, because they imported all the latest Victors and Brunswicks and Okeh's from America, and I would lock myself up in one of those little glass-doored booths, and play all the Duke Ellingtons and Louis Armstrongs and the old King Olivers and all the other things I have forgotten. Basin Street Blues, Beale Street Blues, Saint James Infirmary, and all the other places that had blues written about them: all these I suddenly began to know much of by

indirection and woeful hearsay, and I guess I lived vicariously in all the slums in all the cities of the South: Memphis and New Orleans and Birmingham, places which I have never yet seen. I don't know where those streets were, but I certainly knew something true about them, which I found out on that top floor in Regent Street and in my study at Oakham.

Then I would go back to my godfather's place, and we would have lunch in the dining room, sitting at the little table that always seemed to me so small and delicate that I was afraid to move for fear the whole thing would collapse and the pretty French dishes would smash on the floor and scatter the French food on the waxed floorboards. Everything in the flat was small and delicate. It harmonized with my godfather and his wife. Not that he was delicate, but he was a little man who walked quietly and quickly on small feet, or stood at the fireplace with a cigarette between his fingers, neat and precise as a decent doctor ought to be. And he had something of the pursed lips of medical men—the contraction of the lips that they somehow acquire leaning over wide-open bodies.

Tom's wife was delicate. In fact, she looked almost brittle. She was French, and the daughter of a great Protestant patriarch with a long white beard who dominated French Calvinism from the Rue des Saints-Pères.

Everything in their flat was in proportion to their own stature and delicacy and precision and neatness and wit. Yet I do not say it looked like a doctor's place—still less like an English doctor's place. English doctors always seem to go in for very heavy and depressing kinds of furniture. But Tom was not the kind of specialist that always wears a frock coat and a wing-collar. His flat was bright and full of objects I was afraid to break and, on the whole, I was scared to walk too heavily for fear I might suddenly go through the floor.

What I most admired about Tom and Iris, from the start, was that they knew everything and had everything in its proper place. From the first moment when I discovered that one was not only allowed to make fun of English middle-class notions and ideals but encouraged to do so in that little bright drawing-room, where we balanced coffee-cups on our knees, I was very happy.

They, in turn, lent me all the novels and told me about the

various plays, and listened with amusement to Duke Ellington, and played me their records of La Argentina. It was from them that I was to discover all the names that people most talked about in modern writing: Hemingway, Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh, Céline, Gide and all the rest, except that they did not bother much with poets. I heard about T. S. Eliot from the English Master at Oakham who had just come down from Cambridge and read me aloud "The Hollow Men."

It was Tom who, once when we were in Paris, took me to see a lot of pictures by Chagall and several others like him, although he did not like Braque and the Cubists and never developed any of my enthusiasm for Picasso. It was he who showed me that there was some merit in Russian movies and in René Clair: but he never understood the Marx Brothers. It was from him that I discovered the difference between the Café Royal and the Café Anglais, and many other things of the same nature. And he also could tell you what members of the English nobility were thought to take dope.

Really, all these things implied a rather strict standard of values: but values that were entirely worldly and cosmopolitan. Values they were, however, and one kept to them with a most remarkably nice fidelity. I only discovered much later on that all this implied not only aesthetic but a certain worldly moral standard, the moral and artistic values being fused inseparably in the single order of taste. It was an unwritten law, and you had to be very smart and keenly attuned to their psychology to get it: but there it was, a strict moral law, which never expressed any open hatred of evil, or even any direct and explicit condemnation of any other sins than middle-class hypocrisy, which they attacked without truce. Nevertheless their code disposed of other deordinations with quiet and pointed mockery. The big difficulty with me and my failure was that I did not see, for instance, that their interest in D. H. Lawrence as art was, in some subtle way, disconnected from any endorsement of his ideas about how a man ought to live. Or rather, the distinction was more subtle still: and it was between their interest in and amusement at those ideas, and the fact, which they took for granted, that it was rather vulgar to practise them the way Lawrence did. This was a distinction which I did not grasp until it was too late.



In three months, the summer of 1931, I suddenly matured like a weed.

I cannot tell which is the more humiliating: the memory of the half-baked adolescent I was in June or the glib and hard-boiled specimen I was in October when I came back to Oakham full of a thorough and deep-rooted sophistication of which I was both conscious and proud.

The beginning was like this: Pop wrote to me to come to America. I got a brand-new suit made. I said to myself, "On the boat I am going to meet a beautiful girl, and I am going to fall in love."

The first day I sat in a deck chair and read the correspondence of Goethe and Schiller which had been imposed on me as a duty in preparation for the scholarship examinations at the university.

The second day I had more or less found out who was on the boat. The third day I was no longer interested in Goethe and Schiller. The fourth day I was up to my neck in the trouble that I was looking for.

It was a ten-day boat.

I would rather spend two years in a hospital than go through that anguish again! That devouring, emotional, passionate love of adolescence that sinks its claws into you and consumes you day and night and eats into the vitals of your soul! All the self-tortures of doubt and anxiety and imagination and hope and despair that you go through when you are a child, trying to break out of your shell, only to find yourself in the middle of a legion of full-armed emotions against which you have no defence! No one can go through it twice. This kind of a love affair can really happen only once in a man's life. After one such crisis he has experience and the possibility of a second time no longer exists, because the secret of the anguish was his own utter guilelessness. He is no longer capable of such complete and absurd surprises. No matter how simple a man may be, the obvious cannot go on astonishing him for ever.

I was introduced to this particular girl by a Catholic priest who came from Cleveland and played shuffleboard in his shirt sleeves without a Roman collar on. He knew everybody on the boat in the first day, and as for me, two days had gone by before I even realized that she was on board. She was travelling with a couple of aunts, and the three of them did not mix in with the

other passengers very much. They kept to themselves in their three deckchairs and had nothing to do with the gentlemen in tweed caps and glasses who went breezing around the promenade deck.

When I first met her I got the impression she was no older than I was. As a matter of fact she was about twice my age. She was small and delicate. She had big, wide-open California eyes and was not afraid to talk in a voice that was at once ingenuous and independent and had some suggestion of weariness about it as if she habitually stayed up too late at night.

To my dazzled eyes she immediately became the heroine of every novel and I all but flung myself face down on the deck at her feet. Instead of that I spent my days telling her and her aunt all about my ideals and my ambitions, and she in turn attempted to teach me how to play bridge. And that is the surest proof of her conquest. But even she could not succeed in such an enterprise.

We talked. The insatiable wound inside me bled and grew, and I was doing everything I could to make it bleed more. Her perfume and the peculiar smell of the denicotinized cigarettes she smoked followed me everywhere and tortured me in my cabin.

She told me how once she was in a famous night club in a famous city when a famous person had stared very intently at her for a long time and had finally got up and started to lurch in the direction of her table when his friends had made him sit down and behave himself.

I could see that all the counts and dukes who liked to marry people like Constance Bennett would want also to marry her. But the counts and dukes were not here on board this glorified cargo boat that was carrying us all peacefully across the mild, dark waves of the North Atlantic. The thing that crushed me was that I had never learned to dance.

We made Nantucket Light on Sunday afternoon and had to anchor in quarantine that night. So the ship rode in the Narrows on the silent waters, and the lights of Brooklyn glittered in the harbour. The boat was astir with music. There were parties in all the cabins. Everywhere you went, especially on deck where it was quiet, you were placed in the middle of movie scenery—the setting for the last reel of the picture.

I made a declaration of my undying love. I would not, could

not, ever love anyone else but her. It was impossible, unthinkable. If she went to the ends of the earth, destiny would bring us together again. The stars in their courses from the beginning of the world had plotted this meeting. Love like this was immortal. It conquered time and outlasted the futility of human history.

She talked to me, in her turn, gently and sweetly. What it sounded like was: "You do not know what you are saying. This can never be. We shall never meet again." What it meant was: "You are a nice kid. But for heaven's sake grow up before someone makes a fool of you." I went to my cabin and sobbed over my diary for a while and then, against all the laws of romance, went peacefully to sleep.

However, I could not sleep for long. At five o'clock I was up again, and walking restlessly around the deck. It was hot. A grey mist lay on the Narrows. But when it became light, other anchored ships began to appear as shapes in the mist. One of them was a Red Star liner on which, as I learned from the papers when I got on shore, a passenger was at that precise moment engaged in hanging himself.

At the last minute before landing I took a snapshot of her which, to my intense sorrow, came out blurred. I was so avid for a picture of her that I got too close with the camera and it was out of focus.

Of course the whole family was there on the dock. But the change was devastating. With my heart ready to explode with immature emotions I suddenly found myself surrounded by all the cheerful and peaceful and comfortable solicitudes of home. They took me for a drive on Long Island and showed me where Mrs. Hearst lived and everything. But I only hung my head out of the window of the car and watched the green trees go swinging by, and wished that I were dead.

I would not tell anybody what was the matter with me, and this reticence was the beginning of a kind of estrangement between us. From that time on no one could be sure what I was doing or thinking. I would go to New York and I would not come home for meals and I would not tell anyone where I had been.

Most of the time I had not been anywhere special; I would go to the movies, and then wander around the streets and look at the crowds of people and eat hot dogs and drink orange juice at Nedicks. Once with great excitement I got inside a speak-easy.

And when I found out that the place was raided a few days later I grew so much in my own estimation that I began to act as if I had shot my way out of the wildest joints in town.

Bonnemaman was the one who suffered most from my reticence. For years she had been sitting at home wondering what Pop was doing in the city all day, and now that I was developing the same wandering habits it was quite natural for her to imagine strange things about me, too.

But the only wickedness I was up to was that I roamed around the city smoking cigarettes and hugging my own sweet sense of independence.

I found out that Grosset and Dunlap published more than the Rover Boys. They brought out reprints of writers like Hemingway and Aldous Huxley and D. H. Lawrence and I devoured them all, on the cool sleeping porch of the house at Douglaston, while the moths of the summer darkness came batting and throbbing against the screens, attracted by my light that burned until all hours.

Most of the time I was running into my uncle's room to borrow his dictionary, and when he found out what words I was looking up he arched his eyebrows and said: "What are you reading, anyway?"

At the end of the summer I started back for England on the same boat on which I had come. This time the passenger list included some girls from Bryn Mawr and some from Vassar and some from somewhere else, all of whom were going to a finishing school in France. It seems as if all the rest of the people on board were detectives. Some of them were professional detectives. Others were amateurs; all of them made me and the Bryn Mawr girls the object of their untiring investigations. The ship was divided into these two groups: on the one hand the young people, on the other the elders. We sat in the smoking room all the rainy days playing Duke Ellington records on the portable vic that belonged to one of the girls. When we got tired of that we wandered all over the ship looking for funny things to do. The hold was full of cattle, and there was also a pack of fox-hounds down there. We used to go down and play with the dogs. At Le Havre, when the cattle were unloaded, one of the cows broke loose and ran all over the deck in a frenzy. One night three of us got up in the crow's nest on the foremast, where we certainly

did not belong. Another time we had a party with the radio operators and I got into a big argument about Communism.

That was another thing that had happened that summer: I had begun to get the idea that I was a Communist, although I wasn't quite sure what Communism was. There are a lot of people like that.

The other group was made up of the middle-aged people. At their core were the red-faced, hard-boiled cops who spent their time drinking and gambling and fighting among themselves and spreading scandal all over the boat about the young ones who were so disreputable and wild.

I set foot once more on the soil of England dressed up in a gangster suit which Pop had bought me at Wallach's, complete with padded shoulders. And I had a new, pale grey hat over my eye and walked into England pleased with the consciousness that I had easily acquired a very lurid reputation for myself with scarcely any trouble at all.

The separation of the two generations on board the ship had completed my self-confidence, guaranteed my self-assertion. Any-one older than myself symbolized authority. And the vulgarity of the detectives and the stupidity of the other middle-aged people who had believed all their stories about us fed me with a pleasantly justifiable sense of contempt for their whole generation. Therefore I concluded that I was now free of all authority, and that nobody could give me any advice that I had to listen to.

When I arrived at Oakham several days after the beginning of the term I was convinced that I was the only one in the whole place who knew anything about life, from the Headmaster on down.

III

Huxley had been one of my favourite novelists in the days when I had built up a philosophy of pleasure based on all the stories I was reading. And now everybody was talking about the way Huxley had changed.

Huxley was too sharp to take any of the missteps that usually make such conversions look oafish. You could not laugh at him, very well—at least not for any one concrete blunder. This was not one of those Oxford Group conversions.

On the contrary, he had read widely and deeply and intelligently in all kinds of Christian and Oriental mystical literature, and had come out with the astonishing truth that not only was there such a thing as a supernatural order, but as a matter of concrete experience, it was accessible, very close at hand, a necessary source of moral vitality, and one which could be reached most simply, most readily by detachment and love.

And the big conclusion from this was: we must practise prayer and asceticism. . . .

On the door of the room in one of the dormitories, where Lax and Sy Freedgood were living in a state of chaos, was a large lithograph.

It represented a Hindu messiah, a saviour sent to India in our own times, called Jagad-Bondhu. His mission had to do with universal peace and brotherhood. He was, as it were, in the role of a saint who had founded a new religious Order, although he was considered more than a saint: he was the latest incarnation of the godhead, according to the Hindu belief in a multiplicity of incarnations.

In 1932 a big official sort of letter was delivered to one of the monasteries of this new "Order," outside Calcutta. The letter came from the Chicago World's Fair, which was to be held in the following year. How they ever heard of this monastery, I cannot imagine. The letter was a formal announcement of a "World Congress of Religions." They invited the abbot of this monastery to send a representative to Congress.

I get this picture of the monastery: it is called Sri Angan, meaning "the Playground." It consists of an enclosure and many huts or "cells," to use an Occidental term. The monks are quiet, simple men. They live what we would call a liturgical life, very closely integrated with the cycle of the seasons and of nature: in fact, the chief characteristic of their worship seems to be this deep, harmonious identification with all living things, in praising God. Their praise itself is expressed in songs, accompanied by drums and primitive instruments, flutes, pipes. There is much ceremonial dancing. In addition to that, there is a profound stress laid on a form of "mental prayer" which is largely contemplative. The monk works himself into it by softly chanting lyrical aspirations to God and then remains in peaceful absorption in the Absolute.

For the rest, their life is extremely primitive and frugal. It is not so much what we would call austere.

Their whole spirituality is childlike, close to nature, happy. The life of these pagan monks is one of such purity and holiness and peace, in the natural order, that it may put to shame the actual conduct of many Christian religions, in spite of their advantages of constant access to all the means of grace.

So this was the atmosphere into which the letter from Chicago dropped like a stone. The abbot was pleased by the letter. He did not know what the Chicago World's Fair was. He seemed to see in it the first step towards the realization of the hopes of their beloved messiah, Jagad-Bondhu: world peace, universal brotherhood. Perhaps, now, all religions would unite into one great universal religion, and all men would begin to praise God as brothers, instead of tearing each other to pieces.

At any rate, the abbot selected one of his monks and told him that he was to go to Chicago, to the World Congress of Religions.

This was a tremendous assignment. It was something far more terrible than an order given, for instance, to a newly ordained Capuchin to proceed to a mission in India. That would merely be a matter of a trained missionary going off to occupy a place that had been prepared for him. But here was a little man who had been born at the edge of the jungle told to start out from a contemplative monastery and go not only into the world, but into the heart of a civilization the violence and materialism of which raised gooseflesh on every square inch of his body. What is more, he was told to undertake this journey *without money*. Not that money was prohibited to him, but they simply did not have any. His abbot managed to raise enough to get him a ticket for a little more than half the distance. After that heaven would have to take care of him.

By the time I met this poor little monk who had come to America without money, he had been living in the country for about five years, and had acquired, of all things, the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Chicago. So that people referred to him as Doctor Bramachari, although I believe that Bramachari is simply a generic Hindu term for monk—and one that might almost be translated: "Little-Brother-Without-the-Degree-of-Doctor."

How he got through all the red tape that stands between America and the penniless traveller is something that I never quite understood. But it seems that officials, after questioning him, being completely overwhelmed by his simplicity, would either do something dishonest in his favour, or else would give him a tip as to how to beat the various technicalities. Some of them even lent him fairly large sums of money. In any case he landed in America.

By that time, one look at the Fair buildings, which were already being torn down, told him all he needed to know about the World Congress of Religions. But once he was there, he did not have much trouble. People would see him standing around in the middle of railway stations waiting for Providence to do something about his plight. They would be intrigued by his turban and white garments (which were partly concealed by a brown overcoat in winter). He was frequently invited to give lectures to religious and social clubs, and to schools and colleges, and he more than once spoke from the pulpits of Protestant churches. In this way he managed to make a living for himself. Besides, he was always being hospitably entertained by people that he met, and he financed the stages of his journey by artlessly leaving his purse lying open on the living-room table, at night, before his departure.

The open mouth of the purse spoke eloquently to the hearts of his hosts, saying: "As you see, I am empty," or, perhaps, "As you see, I am down to my last fifteen cents." It was often enough filled up in the morning. He got around.

How did he run into Sy Freedgood? Well, Seymour's wife was studying at Chicago, and she met Bramachari there, and then Seymour met Bramachari, and Bramachari came to Long Beach once or twice, and went out in Seymour's sailboat, and wrote a poem which he gave to Seymour and Helen. He was very happy with Seymour, because he did not have to answer so many stupid questions and, after all, a lot of the people who befriended him were semi-maniacs and theosophists who thought they had some kind of a claim on him. They wearied him with their eccentricities, although he was a gentle and patient little man. But at Long Beach he was left in peace, although Seymour's ancient grandmother was not easily convinced that he was not the hereditary enemy of the Jewish people. She moved around

in the other room, lighting small religious lamps against the intruder.

It was the end of the school year, June 1938, when Lax and Seymour already had a huge box in the middle of the room, which they were beginning to pack with books, when we heard Bramachari was again coming to New York.

I went down to meet him at Grand Central with Seymour, not without a certain suppressed excitement, for Seymour had me all primed with a superb selection of lies about Bramachari's ability to float in the air and walk on water. It was a long time before we found him in the crowd, although you would think that a Hindu in a turban and a white robe and a pair of Keds would have been a rather memorable sight. But all the people we asked had no idea of having seen him.

We had been looking around for ten or fifteen minutes, when a cat came walking cautiously through the crowd, and passed us by with a kind of look, and disappeared.

"That's him," said Seymour. "He changed himself into a cat. Doesn't like to attract attention. Looking the place over. Now he knows we're here."

Almost at once, while Seymour was asking a porter if he had seen anything like Bramachari, and the porter was saying no, Bramachari came up behind us.

I saw Seymour swing around and say, in his rare, suave manner:

"Ah, Bramachari, how are you!"

There stood a shy little man, very happy, with a huge smile, all teeth, in the midst of his brown face. And on the top of his head was a yellow turban with Hindu prayers written all over it in red.

I shook hands with him, still worrying lest he give me some kind of an electric shock. But he didn't. We rode up to Columbia in the subway, with all the people goggling at us, and I was asking Bramachari about all the colleges he had been visiting. When we were coming into the air at 116th Street, I asked him which he liked best, and he told me that they were all the same to him: it had never occurred to him that one might have any special preference in such things.

I lapsed into a reverent silence and pondered on this thought. I was now twenty-three years old. I was very much attached

to places, and had definite likes and dislikes for localities as such, especially colleges, since I was always thinking of finding one that was altogether pleasant to live and teach in.

After that, I became very fond of Bramachari, and he of me, since he sensed that I was trying to feel my way into a settled religious conviction, and into some kind of a life that was centred, as his was, on God.

The thing that strikes me now is that he never attempted to explain his own religious beliefs to me—except some of the externals of the cult, and that was later on.

He was never ironical or unkind in his criticisms: in fact he did not make many judgments at all, especially adverse ones. He would simply make statements of fact, and then burst out laughing—his laughter was quiet and ingenuous, and it expressed his complete amazement at the very possibility that people should live the way he saw them living all around him.

He was beyond laughing at the noise and violence of American city life and all the obvious lunacies like radio programmes and billboard advertising. It was some of the well-meaning idealisms that he came across that struck him as funny. And one of the things that struck him as funniest of all was the eagerness with which Protestant ministers used to come up and ask him if India was by now nearly converted to Protestantism. He used to tell us how far India was from conversion to Protestantism—or Catholicism for that matter. One of the chief reasons he gave for the failure of any Christian missionaries to really strike deep into the tremendous populations of Asia was the fact that they maintained themselves on a social level that was too far above the natives. The Church of England, indeed, thought they would convert the Indians by maintaining a strict separation—white men in one church, natives in a different church: both of them listening to sermons on brotherly love and unity.

But all Christian missionaries, according to him, suffered from this big drawback. They took care of themselves in a way that simply made it impossible for the Hindus to regard them as holy.

Bramachari was simply saying something that has long since been familiar to readers of the Gospels. Unless the grain of wheat, falling in the ground, die, itself remaineth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. The Hindus are not looking for us to send them men who will build schools and hospitals, although

those things are good and useful in themselves: they want to know if we have any saints to send them.

Bramachari was not telling me anything I did not know about the Church of England, or about the other Protestant sects he had come in contact with. But I was interested to hear his opinion of the Catholics. They, of course, had not invited him to preach in their pulpits: but he had gone into a few Catholic churches out of curiosity. He told me that these were the only ones in which he really felt that people were praying.

It was only to Catholics that the love of God seemed to be a matter of real concern, something that struck deep in their natures, not merely pious speculation and sentiment.

However, when he described his visit to a big Benedictine monastery in the Mid-West he began to grin again. He said they had showed him a lot of workshops and machinery and printing presses and taken him over the whole "plant" as if they were very wrapped up in all their buildings and enterprises. He got the impression that they were more absorbed in printing and writing and teaching than they were in praying.

Bramachari was not the kind of man to be impressed with such statements as: "There's a quarter of a million dollars' worth of stained glass in this church . . . the organ has got six banks of keys and it contains drums, bells and a mechanical nightingale . . . and the retable is a genuine bas-relief by a real live Italian artist."

He did not generally put his words in the form of advice: but the one counsel he did give me is something that I will not easily forget: "There are many beautiful mystical books written by the Christians. You should read St. Augustine's *Confessions*, and *The Imitation of Christ*."

Now that I look back on those days, it seems to me very probable that one of the reasons why God had brought him all the way from India, was that he might say just that.

After all, it is rather ironical that I had turned, spontaneously to the east, in reading about mysticism, and now I was told that I ought to turn to the Christian tradition, to St. Augustine—and told by a Hindu monk!

(To be concluded)

THE PRE-RAPHAELITES AND OURSELVES¹

By
ELIZABETH ROTHENSTEIN

WHEN I heard that the Tate Gallery was to hold an exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces in celebration of the foundation of the Brotherhood a hundred years ago, I was surprised at the excitement that I felt. I was surprised, because it is not rare for me to see exhibitions, but it has become rare for me to be excited about them.

The power to rouse to a positive, if sometimes a strained, ambiguous, feeling would seem to be distinctive of the Pre-Raphaelites. It is remarkable that three boys scarcely twenty years old should still have this power a century later; more remarkable still when one reflects that the response they arouse is often half furtive and apologized for and is felt as unworthy of the contemporary adult. The writer of the article that appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* in review of Mr. Ironside's book thought that "the centenary of the foundation of the Brotherhood in the autumn of 1848 provides an opportunity for seeing the movement in proper perspective, free from the disturbing passions which it has provoked in the past." In fact, however, their anniversary falls in a time when, although fashions in taste are changing, there is still no body of romantic criticism that is in secure enough possession of its own philosophy as to be able to give us a new and proper insight on their distinctive merits. Most people are too timid to confess openly to admiration, and those who express any predilection for them are inclined to explain carefully that their liking rests upon an element of fantasy or is an indulgence they permit themselves against their better judgment.

Most critics appear to be agreed that the Pre-Raphaelites had

¹ *Pre-Raphaelite Painters*, by Robin Ironside, with a Catalogue by John Gere. (Phaidon Press. 25s.); *Rossetti, Dante, and Ourselves*, by Nicolette Gray. (Faber. 12s.); *The Pre-Raphaelites and Oxford*, by J. E. Alden. (Alden. 2s. 6d.)

ambitious aims and failed to achieve them. *The Times Literary Supplement* headed its article "A Glorious Failure," and declared that their attempt to return to nature was misconceived because "the secrets of nature cannot be captured by mere accumulation of detail, however beautiful. The Pre-Raphaelites are seen as an interruption in the true development of painting, which had been so notably advanced by Constable and Turner and was to find itself again in Whistler." In a similar vein Mr. Geoffrey Grigson told the readers of *Picture Post* that when he looks at one of these pictures he is unsure whether to "praise or smirk." Later on he adds that "they were the bad boys of art, doing everything they should never do. . . . The subject decided on, they looked for the requisite bits of nature and fitted them together—mice, snails, ivy-leaves, moss, lilies, old boots, sheep's heads. Their eyes never took in a sun-illumined, sun-modified impression at a glance, and gave it translated perfection on canvas."

These two critics, then, agree that the Pre-Raphaelites failed in an ideal of "truth to nature" because they saw only collections of detail, and that they were outside the main stream of painting that was initiated by Turner and Constable, developed by the Impressionists in France and brought back to England by Whistler after his studies in Paris. A further criticism, a lofty one, is made about the subject-matter of their pictures. Of "The Hireling Shepherd," by Hunt, *The Times Literary Supplement* says that it seems at first sight a country idyll but like Millais' "The Blind Girl" turns out to be "really only a sermon in paint"; whereupon both pictures are apparently dismissed as therefore not works of art. And even Geoffrey Grigson, a critic of catholic tastes, defines and declares that "the P.R.s. in their moral ambition ignored the natural confines of painting."

This latter criticism is a duplication of the former; it is another way of saying that as painters they are not in the main line of modern painting, still less toeing it. The notion that painting must have no literary or moral content is a notion that came to full growth in the nineteenth century in France. It had its utility and was, in its context, sufficiently correct. But the indiscriminate, puritanical, moralistic use of this notion, on the strength of which critics lay down what an artist can or cannot do, what is allowed and what is not, irrespective of what artists in fact do, is a critical axiom that is not validated merely because it is taken

for granted. Indeed it is not self-evidently right to erect relatives into absolutes and to turn partial insights into a total and totalitarian programme. Instead we are frustrated of what illumination they do contain. It is not clear, either, that any *body* of painting (with particular specimens the case is different, and Pre-Raphaelite paintings can be deficient in taste and in other qualities) can with propriety be declared to be outside the *true* development—for such a declaration is intended always to convey not a description but a judgment of value—unless one is applying to aesthetics what Professor Butterfield has called the Whig interpretation of History; so that what comes to pass is right and anything else is wrong. The truth is that the poor Pre-Raphaelites were not Frenchmen or Impressionists either; nor were they fumblingly trying to be.

Mr. Robin Ironside has so brilliantly contrasted the French and British character in painting that I shall quote at length from his booklet, *Painting Since 1939*.

It has usually been at the ultimate bidding of more or less unprofessional sentiment that British painters have produced their most affecting works. The truth may be that all great art is the fruit of an original impulse transcending the mere professional, not to say vocational, interest—that the significance, for the greatest painters, of the practice of painting is trifling in relation to the languors or upheavals of the mind of which their pictures are but the key. This point, however, is possibly as controversial as it is attractive, and the unprofessional mainspring of the best British painting is noted here not as a recommendation, but as a distinguishing feature; there is no need to emphasise the fact that it is not one that of necessity contributes to excellence. Nor can the merits of these pictures be intelligently denied whose beauty resides, to the exclusion of all else, in the nice intricacies of meditated simplifications of handling and composition. But painting of such a rigorously sensuous kind, obedient to a fine, functional stringency, has been an infrequent and unproductive occurrence in the history of British art. It is a history that chiefly records the achievements of a landscape school, yet the configurations of soil, the contours of the woods, the inexhaustible variety of the English light, have never been successfully used as the mere pretext for a telling assembly of colours or interplay of projections and recessions. We do indeed delight in Turner's unrivalled skill, but the quintessence of his art is somewhere hidden in his love for nature as a symbolic mirror of human destinies; the inevitable setting of the sun

may well have been, for him, an emblem of the *Fallacies of Hope*—the title of his reputedly long poem of which only a few unequal fragments are now extant; and his masterpieces are imperfectly understood by those who disregard the lofty reflections that recurringly incited his genius upon the transience of empires, the spaciousness of dawns or the fury of the elements.

This is well said. But the impression is given that Mr. Ironside knows that mountains might be more important than molehills but is not going to let himself be committed to it. Yet the truth is that if only we will shake ourselves free of the hypnotic trance induced by the critical fashions of the last fifty years and slough off our timidities and examine the matter with a dispassionate eye, there is not the slightest doubt that art which engages the whole of a man is of more importance, can be greater as art, than art which springs only from his aesthetic and sensuous discriminations. But if this is true, it is also true, I fear, that the rest of an artist's qualities may be relevant to his work and that a man may suffer as an artist from an inferior emotional or moral or intellectual equipment. And in fact, if moral and spiritual insights are outside the natural confines of painting, then the art of Michelangelo is not even not significantly better than the art of a Marie Laurencin; it is inferior, and the "vision" of any callow young bohemian is as "valid" as that of Francis of Assisi, had the latter been also an artist. It is high time we threw out such nonsense. From the creation of cathedrals and palaces and the decoration of them the artist's world has narrowed to the production of nice little easel pictures that look charming in the sitting-room of a flat. Canons of criticism have been established on our preoccupation with these paintings and have made of this beautiful but limited art the standard by the stern application of which all painting is to be judged and firmly put in its place, and made to stand in the corner. Nineteenth-century Frenchmen were interested in the surfaces of things; they had no religious beliefs that might have given them an appetite for penetrating below surfaces, nor had they conspicuously the ability to do so; the Impressionist "return to nature," with its interest in sunlight and the colour to be found in shadow and the relativity of colours one against the other, produced an exquisite art, but hardly one that can intelligently be used as a measure for art in other countries where other experiments were afoot.

The Pre-Raphaelites are looked on as men of feeling rather than of thought and intelligence; it is as if in their young enthusiasm they painted nature with a fresh innocence, imparting to their art their romantic emotionalism. Mr. Ironside says of them that "in a spasm of callow, youthful, nervous effort the whole of their importance was brought to light. The vision was suddenly mature while the visionaries themselves were happily too immature to criticise its validity." This is, of course, a far too ready assumption that a more mature intellect would in fact reject the vision. This is by no means the case. The fact that all the Pre-Raphaelites fell away from their vision is due neither to its invalidity nor to its callow simple-mindedness. The reverse is true. For the truth is that they had got hold of a highly intellectual and important insight, and were none of them great enough to sustain the idea and see through to its implications. They abandoned it because it was too big for them.

The Pre-Raphaelites combined in their work two elements that had hardly ever, in fact never, been combined before: there is a new romantic vision of nature, seeing each particular thing, in its particularity, with wonder as if it were the day of creation and first discovery, and there is none the less a profound sense of the universal inherent in the particular things or imaged by them, a sense that occupied them with universal subject-matters, birth, death, love, the moment of comprehension and of ecstasy. Indeed they were determined to reject not only the academic methods of painting but also the triviality in the subject-matter of their contemporaries. They dedicated themselves to a high purpose and to a profound searching into the spirit of man. From this ideal Holman Hunt in his old age felt that everybody had deserted except himself.

The content of their pictures is in fact different from anything that had been attempted in history before (I am speaking only of their typical works and not of those charming but uncharacteristic subject-pictures that they painted when appealing to the popular taste of the period). The art of the eighteenth century with its portraits, its conversation pieces, its landscapes, had been interrupted towards the end by the first outbreak of the romantic spirit, in its first manifestations, in the over-strange and melodramatic paintings of men like Fuseli and Martin. Blake is too

great a genius to be put into any category, but his subject-matter too is apocalyptic and sometimes almost mad.

The new subject-matter that appeared in English painting in the early nineteenth century was the portraying of the high, significant moment in a human life, painted with an intensity and clarity that raised it to a realm of universals. There is Mulready's "The Sonnet," in which the boy is showing his first attempts at poetry to the girl with whom he is speechlessly in love; Millais' "Blind Girl" with the rainbow and the child's realization of the glory and the blackness; "Autumn Leaves" with the world, seen through the children's dreaming eyes, apparellled in celestial light; Rossetti's "Dante Drawing an Angel," in which Dante is so absorbed in the vision of the angel that he looks at the friends who have recalled him from his contemplation with uncomprehending eyes. But one can hardly stop: pictures of great moments in a soul's history painted with an unequalled intensity. It is characteristic, too, that the ideal and the best of the Pre-Raphaelite works was expressed in great simplicity, lack of facial expression and reticence of gesture. It is profoundly poetic, but belongs to the very poetry of its medium; for the intuition so expressed could not be imparted so vividly and so economically in any other medium.

The Pre-Raphaelite return to nature was, of course, very different from that direct painting from nature developed by the Impressionists, but was no less intellectual. Among the ideas that they disowned was the classical notion of universals that animated the painting of the Academy, expressed as it is in Sir Joshua Reynolds's Third Discourse: "the whole beauty and grandeur of art consists in my opinion in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particulars and details of every kind." Nineteenth-century man thought quite otherwise. In his way of looking at nature he was influenced, among other things, by his acclimatization to scientific experimentation. This way of looking could be also religious, for scientific discoveries could be and were regarded with reverence and excitement as new revelations of the mind of God and of the beauty of the universe that He had created. Science begins and proceeds by particular experiments, and the Pre-Raphaelite outlook on nature was a vision of the beauty of particularity. Scientific drawings were often works of art in themselves, and the men who recorded botanical and zoological specimens would see in their subjects

the marvellousness of God in His works; books like the elder Gosse's *British Sea Anemones and Crystals* were dedicated to the Triune God.

Holman Hunt was such a man, of strong religious conviction: he saw nature as a vast tapestry on which each blade of grass, each leaf, is individual, excellent in beauty, manifesting the mind of the Maker. Science fed his imagination, and from it he gained an understanding that he felt to be the heritage of contemporary man. He wrote of the "charms of science" and the "new life and joy in nature," and what they revealed to the Pre-Raphaelites was the infinite variety of natural things, the extraordinary beauty of all natural forms, and how the smallest things, shells and fern fronds, or the stamens of flowers often held a beauty of design and an exotic vividness of colour not to be found in the larger aspects of the visual universe. They became rapt and absorbed in the study of the selfhood, one might almost say the sprite, of particular forms. For them the greenness of leaves and grass, the redness of blood and poppies had an almost mystic significance, for they spelt the gift of uniqueness bestowed by God on each fragment of His work. This concentration on and eager exploration of particular beauties infused their painting with a sort of super-reality, and from them the Sur-Realists learned much and borrowed freely.

Writing in the *Burlington Magazine* the President of Magdalen College, Oxford, says of Hunt's work that much of it is "metallic, harsh and unsympathetic, but the force and initiative of the movement came from his serious integrity. In his analysis of the field of vision, he took a time point at which the eye had sharply focussed on every detail, whereas the future was to lie with a more instantaneous impression, but it was a genuine and direct investigation of the thing seen. . . . Hunt in his practice and in his writing set out and consistently upheld a theory of visual records, of historical accuracy and of moral purpose which has a permanent place in the history of English art and forms a unique and interesting contribution in the wider developments of Western Europe."

This is good criticism, for Mr. Boase is judging Hunt by canons that are relevant to his aims and achievements. Judged, then, by their own ideals, how nearly did the Pre-Raphaelites achieve them?

Hunt's purpose could, I think, justly be summed up in a desire to glorify God in his painting. This he tried to achieve through truth, truth to nature and the representation of the truth of moral principles. I think he failed because the elements in him never fused into a simplicity that could be translated into a work of art, and this because of what Hunt was religiously. It is not impossible to express moral grandeur in visual form, but it is seldom successfully done in literal, bald realism. Hunt made a discovery, but was neither big enough nor intellectual enough to grasp the full mystical implication of his idea. His religion was evangelical, puritanical, crabbed, non-sacramental, self-righteous and sermonizing, and he lacked completely the inspiration of the young Palmer who temporarily achieved a visionary penetration of nature and "saw the soul of beauty in the forms of matter." Hunt did see the mind of God in the design of natural things, but never attained the moment of inspiration or simple vision. His sermons were tacked on to his art and never coalesced with it.

In order to understand the Pre-Raphaelite view of nature it is necessary to follow the development of their ideas in other men; fruits and offspring more often tell us what a thing means than does a listing of origins and sources. Hunt did not arrive at his conclusions unaided, and it would be difficult to know how far he simply took them from Ruskin and added to them only his own harsh directness. The young Millais charged the Pre-Raphaelite vision with an exquisite sense of poetry and produced a number of beautiful works of art between 1848 and 1856 in which, like Hunt, he came to a genuine artistic unity, though with a subject-matter that was not religious and not so ambitious as Hunt's; poetic and youthful dreams were more easily expressible in visual terms. As for Rossetti, Hunt wrote of him that "modern scientific discoveries had no charms for him. Dantesque shapes of imagery became Rossetti's alphabet of art and in his designs, as in his poems, his mind expressed itself in a form independent of new life and joy in nature."

But the man who had Ruskin's and Hunt's insights into nature and set them in a philosophy and indeed a theology, and who had the stature both of mind and spirit to realize their implications to the full, was Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins went up to Balliol three years after Rossetti had executed his mural in the Oxford Union building. He read *Modern Painters*

and the influence of Ruskin's drawing upon his own is amply evident. In 1864 he met Hunt and was so interested in the Brotherhood that he entered all their names into his diary. His interest in them is attested in many passages of his note-books and their impact was immediately discernible. "He was a faddist," Mrs. Ruggles writes of him, "susceptible to passing but intense fascinations by the branching of a tree, the veining of a leaf, the feathering of a bird, or any phenomenon of nature whose wonder and grace had been borne in upon him unexpectedly. 'Then when the passion, so to speak, has subsided (Hopkins wrote of himself) it is consigned to my treasury of explored beauty, and acknowledged with admiration and interest ever after, while something new takes its place in my enthusiasm. The present fury is the ash, and perhaps barley, and two shapes of growth in leaves and one in tree boughs and also a conformation in fine-weather cloud.'" The Pre-Raphaelite feeling for colour, too, is well expressed when he writes in his diary of climbing a tree: "when you climbed to the top . . . and came out the sky looked as if you could touch it and it was as if you were in a world made of these three colours, the green of the leaves lit through by the sun, the blue of the sky, and the grey blaze of their upper sides against it." Three colours only: the greenness of green, the blueness of blue, the blaze of greyness against the blue of sky.

With a mind both brilliant and trained, spiritually mature, moving with confidence and familiarity in a sacramental world, Hopkins was able to take the rather scientifically-literal examination of nature peculiar to the Pre-Raphaelites and to illumine and expand it with insights gained from his philosophy and his theology. In his hands it became a burning-glass that could simultaneously (this is very rare) concentrate upon particular beauties in their particularity and also in symbol and image, without blurring of this particularity, reveal the profundities of God.

In his passion for the distinctiveness and unique pattern of things Hopkins coined a word to describe his preoccupation. "Inscape" is used to denote the selfhood of a particular thing: its conformation, its design, its shape. (He agreed with Bacon that all beauty has some strangeness in its proportions.) But he went beyond the surface distinctiveness of a thing in his use of the

word, for it is used of the ontological, secret, strictly unknowable, inner self of anything that expresses itself in shape and design. "It is certain," he wrote, "that in nature outward beauty is the proof of inward beauty. . . . Fineness, proportion of feature comes from a moulding force which succeeds in asserting itself over the resistance of cumbersome or restraining matter." That this inner self is determined by God not as a designer who creates and then watches but by God who from moment to moment maintains it in being, affords to Hopkins's view of nature an insight and a depth that the Pre-Raphaelites never enjoyed. But here I must quote "Pied Beauty," a poem so well known that its quotation seems unnecessary; but it is a perfect example of the interest in detail and design characteristic of the P.R.B. vision, deepened and enlarged by the mysticism of Hopkins.

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise Him.

Hunt's failure to make of his painting an effective means of glorifying God was owing to the inferior quality of his religious perceptions and to a radical unsubtlety of mind. He often illustrated a religious text, but chose texts and subjects in which he could sermonize and reproach his fellows. Instead of conveying some apprehension of the God whom he sought to serve, which might irresistibly have drawn men to his Lord, his thought was rather to accuse men of their sins. He was apparently one of the elect, and in a safe position for stone-throwing. The background of his religious training was narrow, censorious, concentrated on morals. The Christ that he portrayed was a suffering and defeated Christ continually at the mercy of evil men. It is one of the gloomiest of the parodies of Christianity.

It is extremely interesting to contrast the religious effectiveness of the art of Hunt and of Hopkins. For Hopkins was a genius as an intelligence as well as an artist. His mind was able to hold together in one grasp the many elements of the economy of the redemption, and it was a mind that was accurate and ill at ease with the vague. "I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at; I know the beauty of our Lord by it. Its inscape is mixed of strength and grace." His theology of the Incarnation of the Word of God means that a bluebell is no vague and unclear image but one sharply defined and whose imagery has a definite place in the map of his mind, and this whole mind and self was brought to his art.

There are other differences, too, of spiritual stature and maturity. Both Hunt and Hopkins used symbols to express what Christ meant to them, Hunt in "The Scapegoat" and Hopkins in "The Windhover." "The Scapegoat" represents the broken Christ, despised and rejected of men; the animal is depicted driven away to die alone in a dreary waste where the bones of dead things lie bleaching. Hunt's intention is to make the spectators feel shame for their sin and guilt for their hardness of heart. But in effect even the animal lover is left unmoved by a literal interpretation, and *The Times* of the day reported that it suggested nothing more lofty than the Sunday joint. But what a joint: it is an alarmingly sick piece of mutton.

Hopkins's vision of Christ includes the crucifixion and redemptive suffering but is aware not only of the grandeur of the Incarnation but also of the Resurrection and joy. He is swept away by gladness at the beauty of Christ as He carries out His redemptive work. Our Lord is "morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon" and he watches Him

High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
 In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on a swing,
 As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and
 gliding
 Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
 Stirred for a bird—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

His image of crucifixion, too, is not one of droopiness but of splendour:

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here

Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

Holman Hunt aspired to produce great and high art. But this demands a great artist, and a man who is a great and not merely a good artist must be great in other respects, in mind and in spirit. Hunt was a good artist and a most limited human being, who set himself an ideal that was beyond his attainment. Contrariwise, in Hopkins's work one is always stirred with the "achieve of, the mastery of the thing."

Concluding his account of Hunt, Mr. Gaunt writes that "Holman Hunt was awarded the Order of Merit. He enjoyed wealth and esteem. He painted excellent pictures; but to the end of his days he had a grief and a grievance: grief that he had not more powerfully moved the world into the way of faith and righteousness; a grievance at the misunderstanding of the part he had played in the Pre-Raphaelite movement." Hunt felt that he and he alone remained true to Pre-Raphaelite ideals, and as the years went by he forgot that he had once been inspired by Rossetti's genius. For there were two distinct personalities and two strands in the Pre-Raphaelite skein. It was from Hunt that the movement gained its visual and technical impetus. Not only did he preach the direct study of nature and natural forms, but he taught the Brotherhood to work on a white ground, thus obtaining a cleanliness and a brilliance of colour unknown previously. But there had also been Rossetti.

For Rossetti had an afflatus, and Svengali-like breathed poetry and inspiration and turned into artists men who had little or no talent known to themselves before. Hunt had wished one of their aims to be a firm moral purpose with a religious background. Rossetti had equally with Hunt a contempt for the triviality of much of the painting of his contemporaries, and, steeped in Dante, wanted like him to treat of a high and serious subject-matter. Dante wrote the story of men's souls and tried to find in philosophy and theology the key to the overwhelming experience of his life, his love for Beatrice. Rossetti had translated the *Vita Nuova* by the time that he was twenty and from it had received his own peculiar inspiration, the painting of moments of exalted significance. Mrs. Gray has pointed out that during his great period almost all his pictures are of "people whose whole being

and consciousness is as it were gathered together in an act of awareness—Galahad aware of the holiness of the chapel and full of wonder, Lancelot and Guinevere aware of their love and Arthur in his tomb between, Paolo and Francesca absorbed in their union, Mary Magdalen aware that she loves Christ, Dante aware of Beatrice and his love, S. George and princess, Rachel and Leah quiet in the awareness of their own life and its bliss. What Rossetti is painting all the time is not the tenseness of a moment of drama, but the tenseness of the moment of realization."

Dante's great moment of realization struck into him so deeply and filled him with such a sense of the mysteriousness of human love that he set himself to plumb the meaning of the mystery. If the destiny of the soul is beatitude in the vision of God, what is the meaning of the analogous but lesser beatitude of human love? The working out of this image and its relation to its archetype leads to the writing of the Divine Comedy. Rossetti, however, was never able or willing, as his mistranslations show, to understand that Dante had clear meanings for his images; he was interested in them rather for their emotive content, and it might even be an advantage to have them vague. He was not at all interested in the mystery of God; he was interested in mystery, content to leave implications in the shadows. He had real greatness or the beginnings of it, but through some mental or moral weakness was satisfied to paint people in moments of vision without seeking to see for himself or for us what their vision was, what they saw. Rather, Prometheus-like, he tried to steal the divine fire to use it for ends of his own, and the result is that, whereas his pictures have often great beauty and purity and wonder, at other times there is something in them cloying and unpleasant, strangely morbid and evil. He could use the analogy of the soul's absorption in God to express the ecstatic absorption of the soul in creatures; but idolatry has its consequences no less than anything else.

Just as the other Pre-Raphaelites painted the particularity of particular things, so Rossetti painted the particularity of the moment of ecstasy, of beatitude, of awareness, and "the extreme brilliance and opaqueness of his colouring is surely intended as an analogy to the intensity of his conception, the absorbed life he represents." He had it in his power, as Hunt had not, to attain



By courtesy of the Trustees of the Tate Gallery

ARTHUR HUGHES
The Tryst (c. 1850)

GRAHAM
SUTHERLAND
Green Tree
Form: Interior
of Woods
(1939)





W. HOLMAN
HUNT
Strayed
Sheep
(1852)



By courtesy of the Trustees of the Tate Gallery

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Beata Beatrix (c. 1863)

the ideal Hunt had set himself but he failed. It is the penalty of mock-mysticism. None the less, he was the one genius of the movement, who failed, perhaps, because he was less interested in understanding than in using a crepuscular theme for an emotional purpose.

I have suggested that we examine the Pre-Raphaelites' ideals and see how far they could be said to have failed or to have succeeded in the realm of art that they created and explored. Their field of exploration was in fact a far more intellectual and fascinating one than that of the Impressionists by whose canons they are judged and found wanting; it is a field that they opened to us but only partially developed. Their vision and subject-matter had implications and possibilities far beyond their powers, and for this reason they felt the strain of their tensions too acutely and the vision failed. Or had they failed the vision? Speaking one day of his abandoning the P.R.B., Millais said to Bell Scott that "one could not live long doing that."

The one man who did realize to the full the P.R.B. ideal was Hopkins; but he did not live long either—nor did he always reach the incandescence of inspiration at which his insight was translatable into pure art. In painting perhaps the most perfect expression of the ideal was Arthur Hughes, for he has the poetry of the best of Millais, the beauty of detail and solemn earnestness of Hunt, and the sense of ecstasy of Rossetti without any touch of the evil; yet he was not so great as any of the others and was perhaps preserved by the very fact that his qualities were minor.

The English are slow to appreciate their own genius. The French had had nothing but contempt for the movement and English criticism dully accepted their uncomprehending strictures. Probably no great artists have ever fallen into greater disrepute or unfashionableness. Of course, they have suffered through the making of inferior converts, and the term "Pre-Raphaelite" is used to include almost anything mid-nineteenth century that is not characteristically academic. Or have sometimes their qualities been appreciated without acknowledgment made?

For the Surrealists noted their unique power of presenting things in a more than earthly brilliance and intensity. They copied their exquisiteness of detail, their expressionist use of colour, Rossetti's feeling for evil (slight in him but carried to the point of corruption by them), and his mysteriousness, but

à rebours. As I remarked earlier, Rossetti believed not in the mystery of God but in mystery: the Surrealists believed in mystification, a poltergeistish sort of mystification. They stole almost all the Pre-Raphaelite ideas; only they reversed them: for meaning they substituted non-meaning (sometimes nonsense); for morality they substituted not amorality but positive non-morality. No critic said that these things, once they were turned upside down, were "outside the natural confines of painting" and "could not" be done. It is surely an odd thing that the morally good is declared to be outside the confines of painting but that the aggressively non-moral or the morally bad is permissible and proper.

As the years go by, admiration for the Pre-Raphaelites slowly grows. It will be long, however, I fear, before their beauty and their greatness is understood or fully appreciated. Contemporaries do not know whether to smirk or to praise, and when looking at these pictures with the young and sophisticated, even with those who have expert knowledge of works of art, one cannot but notice the restless embarrassment of their reactions, almost as if they were repressing a feeling of guilt before a glimpse of something slightly obscene. I have observed this especially before such pictures as represent romantic love whose fulfilment is delayed; the "Long Engagement" and "The Tryst" of Hughes provoke an uneasy snicker. Such paintings upset the Victorians in that, in poignancy or quiet ecstasy, they communicated a strange quality of love that was found disturbing; to spectators for whom love is largely biological or who see no sense in chastity they are no less embarrassing for being objects of ridicule. Admiration for the P.R.B. is still to be apologized for or smiled away. It may be that without religious belief they are incomprehensible.

I have called this article "The Pre-Raphaelites and Ourselves," and in it have discussed two nineteenth-century ways of looking at nature, that of the Pre-Raphaelites in England and that of the Impressionists in France. Could there be any heritage of Pre-Raphaelitism now?

The two ways are opposites. Impressionism, interested entirely in surfaces of things and how these things are affected by light, produced a body of painting that cannot be equalled for its

sensuous beauty. But after surfaces had been recorded in every possible light, after taste, selection and organization had added every possible refinement, the field was left barren for further development. The vein was worked out just at a time when materialism had come to be taken for granted, and painters were not impelled to penetrate below surfaces for essences. Horses in a field scoured of vegetation will form morbid appetites: they will strip trees of their bark or eat the railings of their pasture and sometimes the soil itself; in just the same way, when a vital field of inspiration has become exhausted, artists will cast about for a new vision with a restlessness that approaches morbidity, or feed an appetite that is grown freakish. We do in fact find that, with Picasso as their acknowledged leader, modern artists have been forced to borrow freakishly from every past age to provide them with new styles for painting and sculpture.

Negroart, Mexican art, the Easter Islands have from time to time filled the lack of any personal convictions or religious beliefs, and supplied for our own poverty in subject-matters. Henry Moore says of primitive art that it is one of mystery and wonder, that its characteristics are intensity and life. He is right, but it is impossible to borrow mystery and wonder or any interior dynamism. Primitive art is charged with a passionate meaning; the power it has over us lies not primarily in its simplified forms or purely sculptural values but in a certain quality of genuine awe that it excites. How feeble and pitiable are the modern works of art based on or derived from primitive art was shown with startling clarity at the recent exhibition in London of "40,000 years of modern art," where the originals were seen side by side with their progeny. There the almost terrifying authenticity of the masks and totems stripped from their derivatives their veil of mystification and esoteric fantasy and harshly underlined the emptiness. And this, indeed, far from being an unshared opinion of my own was the generally expressed view of critics and committee and guests who attended the Private View of that exhibition.

This is a digression, but one that serves to throw into a better perspective the Pre-Raphaelite achievement. For they have intensity and life, and, at their best, genuine mystery and wonder. In the hands of a Hopkins their view of nature could produce art that can rank with the greatest masterpieces of the world. But as I said earlier, the vision was too big for the men who discovered

it, and though it has been carried to its fullness in poetry no painter has appeared with powers of mind and spirit and hand great enough to explore the field.

Graham Sutherland is an artist, and a very considerable one, who has been likened to Hopkins, at first sight with justice. For his way of looking at natural forms, tree boles, shapes of rocks, landscapes, might seem to be a penetrating to some inner secret that they possess, and the recording on paper or canvas of the impact of their unique and distinctive, and ontological, quality on his sensibility. "Landscape is a feeling." Shakespeare has been quoted in illustration of him:

Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish;
A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon't, that nod unto the world
And mock our eyes with air: thou hast seen these signs;
They are black vesper's vestments.

It is a relevant illustration, closer perhaps than was intended, and shows to what degree the differences with Hopkins are more revealing than a few apparent similarities.

For in fact Sutherland's feeling for natural forms often seems to be one in which relationships are described and are more prominent than the forms themselves, or rather it is one in which by association relationships are evoked by them: a fallen tree has a weird resemblance to a woman's body, a plant darkly suggests the fierceness of a beast of prey. Is there, as in Moore, such a feeling for the community of nature that human anatomy runs into the non-human and into geology, or vice versa? But certainly relationships are suggested, darkling and weird and "mysterious." In all Sutherland's work there is this insistence on the invincible strangeness of nature, an emphasizing of some pregnant queerness rather than an understanding of the meaning. Mysteriousness is invoked almost like a spell from a witch's cauldron.

Hopkins is not only the greatest of the Pre-Raphaelites; he is the key to them; he may show where some moderns "fable and miss." When he studied the inscape of a thing or a place it was to discover the selfhood of the thing, and it deserves notice that his

prima facie difficulty and the unorthodoxy of his language are never in the interests of adding any fascination of queerness to his apprehension of inscape. He used words in a way of his own and coined compounds and ran counter to ordinary diction in an effort to cleanse words of associations so that they could with the greater precision declare the unique objective selfhood of the thing that he describes. (Like Holman Hunt, he has been disparaged as being merely sensuously and minutely descriptive.) Everyone has the experience, on reading him, not only that one is in a vivid world where there is life and a clarity that will have nothing of the merely vague or uncanny, but that he has seen as we see, but more deeply; that he has described, as we should have liked but never could, the distinctive character of things and places.

Not so with Graham Sutherland. It is rare that we can see a thing as he has named it. The experience is his own; it has relatively little to do with Hopkins's preoccupation, things as they are. He does not leave to his landscapes, his trees, his rocks, and his plants, enough of their objective inscape to be a link between himself and us. We can only marvel at the strange and complex world of his imagination; his experience is not ours. Sutherland loves darkness, or did until quite recently, not the kingdom of daylight and its Dauphin; there is invocation of dark and weird phantasms where a tree shape may seem a demon and a cloud an omen of disaster. There is no wonder of mystery, as there is in his first master, Samuel Palmer, but simply a somewhat brooding fantasy-world.

In his *Spiritual Aeneid* Monsignor Ronald Knox tells us that in his own thinking and inquiring the moment came when at last he *saw*, and that at that moment what had seemed to him all along to be a polar bear turned out to be only a pile of bedclothes. Sutherland's art seems to suggest that bedclothes are in fact more interestingly seen as polar bears. This is not mystery, or insight, surely, but shadows and glooms in which are vaguely imagined strange and troubling forms that prefigure no daylight reality whatever. Yet Sutherland is in fact a most remarkable and quite unusually fine artist.

We do indeed lose by not understanding the Pre-Raphaelite vision or the springs and sustenance of it. The understanding might even liberate us from the poverty of the present, and from shams.

One reads so much about the Pre-Raphaelites that throws so faint a light on their peculiar achievements that Nicolette Gray's essay, *Rossetti, Dante and Ourselves* comes as a book whose slightness of bulk holds enormous stimulus and illumination. Mrs. Gray has analysed the drawings and paintings of Rossetti's early period and examined them in the light of Dante's philosophy and beliefs, for Dante exercised a decisive influence on the young Rossetti. I am indebted to her, in the preceding article, for many enlightening observations that have helped me to see the whole Pre-Raphaelite movement more clearly. Mrs. Gray's argument is tightly reasoned and not always crystal-clear, so that it must be read in full to be appreciated. It is rare to find a book about an artist that is original in approach, rarer still to find one that manifests profound intelligence. Anyone who wants to understand Rossetti must read it. I do not think, however, that she has worked out her view and remarks about modern art fully enough to bring either light or conviction.

The Phaidon Press book, *Pre-Raphaelite Painters*, is one of the most successful of a remarkable series. Mr. Ironside's Introduction is written with his usual fastidiousness, but the style is at times so overloaded and so exotic that his meaning is quite obscure. His comments are descriptive rather than penetrating or revealing, and one gathers his partisanship for these paintings only from the enjoyment that he obviously derives from describing them. Pre-Raphaelite pictures are excellent in reproduction and could yield exceptionally beautiful details. Unfortunately, however, the book is so wide in scope (it even reproduces works by Leighton, though he explicitly disassociated himself from the movement) that Mr. Ironside has left himself little or no space for such details. One feels, too, that Mr. Ironside's particular taste has imposed a wrong emphasis on the book. Burne-Jones is given far too large a number of plates, while Holman Hunt, one of the two architects of the movement, is represented only in five. Mr. Gere's descriptive catalogue adds considerably to the interest of this fine volume.

A DOG'S LIFE¹

(Translated from the French of Georges Bernanos.)

EVERY day I ask myself: for whom do I write? For whom? For not why? Yes, for whom?

I can easily doubt whether I am really a writer at all; since four years of war by no means convinced me that I was really a soldier; and even to-day the presence of my six children does not convince me that I am really and truly a father of a family. Father, writer or soldier, I have always had the feeling that I do not know my job; or rather, that I do that know even its elements; that I have failed in my very apprenticeship. I come to the end of my task as one comes to the end of long and over-complicated addition sums; I finally fall to counting on my fingers, worse luck!—quite certain that God will find I have got the answers wrong. That is not a feeling that makes life seem very valuable; still, it does not reduce me to despair, because I ask myself whether, when all is said and done, anyone does really know his job thoroughly; whether, even, a job ever can be known thoroughly. People tell themselves one fine day: "I am a soldier," or "I am a writer," or "I am a father," and there-upon strike an attitude with imperturbable dignity that becomes a substitute for their true self.

(People will say, as they have said before, that I always resent great reputations; and I might reply, as I have replied before, that I only resent reputations when they delude. No one objects to dignified husbands being both dignified and cuckolded; or says that they are thereby casting a useless slur on their reputation for dignity. Is that clear?)

I may well doubt whether I am really a writer, but I have found plenty of readers for all that; and whether my papers are in order or not, the law does not so far allow M. José Germain, for instance, or M. Paul Reboux to bring an action against me for practising their profession illegally. I have readers, lots of readers; I am amazed how many there are; I have never stopped

¹ Pages from a diary written in Brazil in 1940, forming part of *Les Enfants Humiliés*.

being amazed at it for thirteen years; my friends will all agree with me on that point. Not that I imagine I am a difficult writer: far from it! I write as I suffer or as I hope; and if I am perforce not a very good judge of my own writings, I do thoroughly know my hopes and my sufferings; my material is solid and easily come by; one can always obtain it anywhere. You will tell me that an intelligent reader always puts into a book more than he gets out of it; that a clever dressmaker would not hesitate to bet she could cut an elegant gown out of dustman's corduroy. I don't deny it. It is quite possible that my rough and ready frankness acts as a stimulant in that way. Certain over-delicate stomachs end up by not being able to digest anything except ordinary bread. God grant that I may be that ordinary bread. But what I fear, rather, is that some people attribute motives to me; that they suspect me of proclaiming that I have been deceived in minor ways, the better shamefacedly to hide some secret fundamental deception. No, I have not been deceived; nothing has ever deceived me in the strict sense of the word; the least real deception would have reduced me to silence; I swear it would! The only real deception is deception suffered at the hands of what one loves; and I could never, never tolerate being deceived by what I love. Life has not deceived me, and men have not, and they never will. Anyone who deceived me did no more than seem to do so: it was I who deceived myself. I wanted to pretend to be suffering beyond my capacity; and in the face of the promise of God Himself; I manufactured my own consolations. Have I then deceived myself? Looking at it now, that seems too flattering a hypothesis. I have failed in courage. That is all.

What I love has never deceived me; but what I cannot abide is that others should be deceived by what I love. The way fools are deceived causes me bitter suffering, but not, I believe, the kind of suffering it causes them: because I can see the wry face their deception makes them wear, and they cannot. They do not think they are either ugly or ridiculous: I think they are both. I could not endure that imposture should lower and degrade people, till deceiver and deceived are each as ugly as the other. That to me is an intolerable sight.

"Very well, don't look at it! . . ." What do you suggest I should do then? It is within myself that I am looking. Oh, I make no claim to any sort of supernatural vocation. I don't

imagine that God sent me into this world for the express purpose of suffering with fools. If I did, I should be only too sorry to have failed in sanctity, to have missed the sublime chance of becoming one day the patron saint of fools. But there is undoubtedly a part of my soul mysteriously in tune with theirs, and preserved by a miracle. What miracle? The miracle of being a Christian. If I were not a Christian I should evidently be a fool, though I don't know what sort of fool. Though I have never shown any particular inclination towards lying, at least towards profitable lying, I was just as capable as any fool of swallowing an enormous dose of lies. I might have turned that ability to account from my youth up; I was so much in love with happiness, God knows, that I could have taken my fill of it—my fill of illusions and glamour. I could have swallowed them to bursting point.

I do not know for whom it is I write, but I do know why I write. I write to justify myself. In whose eyes? I have told you before, but I will risk being laughed at by telling you again: in the eyes of the child that I was. Whether that child speaks to me any longer or not, I shall never acknowledge his silence; I shall keep on answering him. I am quite ready to teach him to suffer; I shall never let him side-track suffering. I would rather see him rebellious than deceived, for rebellion is generally only a stage on the way, whereas deception takes you outside this world altogether; it is solid and dense as hell. The interest so many people take in our necessarily childish dialogue disconcerts me more than it reassures me, because after all they only hear my side of it. I keep wanting to stop and face them squarely and say: Please notice! It is not myself that I am reassuring. I have no need to reassure myself. Nor is it I who am suffering. All the impostors on this planet, male or female, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo or violet, black or white, could beat a tattoo on my old hide: I should feel them no more than flies. It is not myself I am avenging. Why should I be avenged on anybody? Impostors make me laugh aloud. Their impostures are profitable, I don't deny it, but they have precious little to show for such an expenditure of energy. If once that fact began to dawn on them, they would start looking round for another job. It doesn't begin to dawn on them precisely because they are impostors, that is to say, clowns turned inside out. That is the expression, turned

inside out, like a glove, their real skin on the inside, their wrong side exposed to the sun, living and raw. No one would have the heart to beat such miserable excoriated specimens. I gave up any dream of punishing liars ages and ages ago; their own lying looks after that; lying is the cruellest self-torture ever invented by man. You want me to be lenient, but I know something better than lenience; I no longer need your aspirin. Years and years ago I realized that the problem of imposture is fundamental; anybody who solves it has the key to all the rest—to all the problems provided by wretched human nature. Years ago I gave up thinking of imposture as a simple travesty, or of the impostor as a barn-stormer who pays occasional visits to the dressing-room. The impostor and his imposture are one and the same thing; there is a fate about imposture. If the impostor were not an impostor, he would be neither true nor false; he would be nothing at all. He defends his imposture as his life, for it is in fact his life. What further can one say? Since society is unable to do without glamour, the glamour of lies, I don't object to your maintaining that it exploits its impostors cynically, that it makes the most of them, that it ought to award pensions to reformed impostors, even if they had never been in the service of society. The discipline of imposture is as strict as ours. The impostor does not dispose of his imposture as he pleases, according to his need or fancy. All impostors hang together.

Yes, when we have reached the point where we face contempt as a humiliating temptation, when contempt arouses in us the same feelings as prostitution, we can be better employed than in filling pages about our illusions—cash on delivery, at the price fixed by *maison Gallimard*. My illusions are of no interest to anybody; and I rather think that people who force themselves to pity me for mine are really only sentimentalizing over their own. Perhaps it would be better for each of us to attend to his own dead; we have not each the same dead to mourn.

Have I myself, anyway, so very many dead to mourn? However far I go back into the past, I don't remember having many illusions. An illusion is a cheap dream, a thing of wool and waste, a dream too often grafted on to a precocious experience, the dream of some notary-to-be. I have dreamed dreams, yes, but I knew perfectly well that they were dreams. An illusion is an abortion of a dream, a dwarf dream, big only for babies. But

when I dreamed, I wanted my dreams to be enormous—else what use were they? And that precisely is the reason why they have never deceived me. If I were starting life over again, I should try to make them bigger still; because life is infinitely bigger and more beautiful than I ever believed, even in my dreams; and I, infinitely smaller. I dreamed of saints and heroes, not bothering about the in-between sizes proper to our race; and I now realize that the in-between sizes scarcely exist; that saints and heroes are the only ones that really count. The in-between sizes are just a spineless mush, a pulp—anyone who has happened to take a handful knows the rest. And that jelly would not even deserve to have a name if the saints and heroes did not give it one, did not give it their name of "man." In a word, it is thanks to the saints and heroes that I am anything at all; they have long ago given me my fill of dreams, and saved me from illusions. For example, I have never taken the "devout" for Christians, military men for soldiers, or great personages for anything else but be-whiskered overgrown children. I used to ask myself what use they were to anybody. I am still asking myself the same question. The fact is, they have never been any use to me. There, now, is something to make my realist mentors sit up! *There* is something that has given a meaning to my poor little life, otherwise so paltry and so stupid! They told me I must be a realist or starve. But it was my dreams that fed me! Churched people, military men, great personages, the whole lot of them, have been absolutely no use to me. I have had to find other patrons—Donissan, Menou-Segräis, Chantal, Chevance—it is from their hands that I receive my bread.

You will say that all this has got nothing to do with you; that if I want to continue my conversation with the child that I was, this touching family scene leaves you icy-cold; that you don't care a rap for the brat. You are free to say so. I cannot share your opinion on that last point, but I don't mind. I am quite prepared to take all this trouble even if the result is only a picture of myself as clumsy and unpretentious as a schoolboy's drawing in the margin of a book. Written confidences keep the sheen of novelty but for a moment. Let a few years pass, and under the craftsman's varnish the foolishness will begin to show everywhere, like decay. It is sincerity that hastens the corruption of men and the works of men; only lies escape decay. They dry

up without decaying, taking on little by little the hardness and polish of stone. Lies are mineral.

I ask no better fate than to decay. I know perfectly well that all there is of living human truth in my books will be the first to be eaten by worms, like myself. I don't mind if we decay together. And already, thank God, the work is begun: how insignificant my share of it has seemed, when looked at at close quarters! At least I have never taken myself seriously for a "creator" in the sense that my friends of the Society of Men of Letters like to give to the word. I have collected corruptible elements like the twigs of a faggot, and I am waiting for them to be consumed by a fire—a more searching and undying fire, without which nothing can rise again. The thought of the people up and down who enlist themselves on my behalf, generously flatter themselves that they link their destiny to mine by a miracle beyond comprehension and beyond sympathy—that does not deceive me. Heaven defend them from wanting to preserve what they love! Far from preserving what it loves, my love would rather put a finger on the precise spot where corruption would begin, as a fruit begins to rot at the place where it is touched.

So I no longer flatter myself that I write for a small number of kindred spirits. That is a claim that strikes me as ridiculous to-day. I no longer have any idea whom it is I write for. I am not concerned about knowing. I no longer want to make advances to anybody; and this not out of pride, certainly, but because I have no confidence that I can dispose of what is mine in my own way. And then, I should probably not offer my best; it is preferable that you should choose for yourselves. Long ago I gave up being afraid of the word "commonplace." A common oven is a communal oven, everybody's oven. I do not belong to the theatre world; I have no prejudice against what they call "ovens"¹; I wish I could hope that my bakehouse was the kind in which everybody is free to come and bake his bread—but alas! that too is only a dream. I am not making these remarks out of humility. I don't know whether I am humble or not; and anyway, if I were, I should not be aware of it, so why question myself? There are many ways of being sincere; I should like to be so in my own way. I should like to be so stupidly sincere as to discourage the

¹ *Four*, i.e., fiasco.

clever people who go rooting up intentions as a pig roots up truffles. Every confidence has a stupid side; every cry from the depths can be imitated on the clarinet or the bassoon; every sob pulls a face: we may as well accept the fact once and for all. What do I risk? My reputation? It is yours to do what you like with, if I still have any left. I have had a reputation, like everybody else, but I never knew what to do with it, so I feel no merit in handing it over to you. Since the publication of *Grands Cimetières*, for example, whatever I owed to Criticism has gone up in smoke. The critics have surrounded me with a silence that I should like to think impressive. I hope it is a silence that will disconcert the experts who advise and encourage the timid—those who follow you in the street, hat in hand, and say, "I didn't like to approach you just now, you were so surrounded with people." I am not much surrounded with people now: no modesty in that; I can prove what I say! I don't at all feel I have got even with my eminent friends who have talked so eloquently about my books; but no one who really knows me, no one who has sat at my table, gone for a spin with me on the back of the old red-and-grey motor-bike, made the peace between my children in the course of their epic rows, swept up the broken crockery, or stuck paper over a broken window-pane, none of these would dare to deny that all those wonderful analyses of my intentions reveal absolutely nothing about me. I find myself enveloped by these in a sort of splendid golden cope—or rather, I don't find myself there at all; and I am afraid I am not found there either by the good people who on the word of those same gentlemen judge me to be quite different from themselves, poor devils, whereas I might be their twin brother. I have no intentions; I have never had intentions; I have never had time enough. I am no more a man of intentions than I am a "troubled soul," even though this last by confession. I might disillusion those of my Catholic friends who collect these wan flowers of the holy-water stoup. One cannot afford the luxury of intentions when one is working on the corner of a table, under the perpetual threat of movings-out without beginning or end, and movings-in without end or beginning, according to the trend of the franc, or the piastre, or the peseta, or the milreis, or the publisher's irregular largesse. I have had a dog's life, that is the fact. I do not mean a hell of a life, I mean strictly a dog's life. I do not regret it; but truly my

life has over-slaved; it has been rained into too much; it is useless to lock it up, I may as well let passers-by come in; there is no reputation left to get broken.

* * *

I do not claim to justify my books by my life, any more than I claim to justify my life by my books. I should like both my books and my life to be so easy of access that the shortest way would lead people straight to them. M. Paul Bourget used to tell his friends that he would give all his novels in exchange for my *Histoire de Mouchette*. Now, I did not write the *Histoire de Mouchette* for the sake of M. Paul Bourget; that book therefore seems to me one of the snares that despite myself literature has set in my books. I am a writer, I can't help it. The instrument I use is hateful to me when I use it clumsily, and when I happen to turn it to account cleverly, nine times out of ten I succeed only in satisfying the connoisseurs, the initiated. Well, it is my instrument, the only one I possess; I have not deserved that God should fashion me any other. I know perfectly well that a saint, no less, used to dream of this means of touching hearts. It is my instrument, so be it. But I should not like anyone to mistake my instrument for me. Generally people who follow my trade lament that they cannot transcribe, pen in hand, more than a ridiculously small part of the interior life of which they possess the secret. But it seems to me evident that I cannot be a good judge of an interior state where I am perhaps the victim of a simple effect of perspective, never having observed it from the outside, and never even having taken up residence there in the true sense. For so many years I have built almost nothing there; I have lived there like a shipwrecked mariner on an island, or a child in a garden. But it is a garden like any other, except that the light there is perhaps a little harder than elsewhere—a peculiarity that formerly escaped my notice but is apparent to-day, because, what with age and fatigue, I have come at last to the conclusion that I have not so much gambled with the light there as looked it full in the face, challenged it, risen above it. Far from having the idea that I express only a small part of the impressions which go to make up my life and my soul, what surprises me is that they have provided me with enough material for a single volume—thanks to I know not what gift, or miracle. It is this

gift that I would like to share out with others; it is the only alms I can give; and it is precisely the thing that is incommensurable and incomunicable. My sufferings are those of just anyone, but the first to come passes them by without recognizing them; and if I run after him, all I have to offer him is a measure of flour of a sort he already knows quite well. "I have enough at home," he says. I cannot teach him to make, with this flour, any bread other than his own; yet it is with this bread that I would fain satisfy his hunger.

I wonder if I should have dared in the past to brave the ridicule of such an admission. In this solitude, under this storm-season sun of Brazil, in the midst of my comical humped cows that look as if they are suffering from an enormous goitre, so unlike ordinary cows that they might be a small child's drawing of a cow, my confession seems less stupid; or rather I no longer care whether it is stupid or not. Everybody, every writer, must have felt what I feel at some time or other—the sting of a misunderstanding that he cannot remedy: but it is a feeling most writers try to get rid of. "What you are really bemoaning," people will say, "is that Mouchette will never read your *Histoire de Mouchette*: did you write it for her, you old humbug?" I don't know what to reply. In fact the trouble is I can't reply. I have undertaken a life that leads nowhere, but I didn't know it led nowhere. I shall never grow tired of trying to find a way out. The other people inside have made up their minds long ago: "We shall never get out. Very well, let's stay and organize the position." I don't mind resigning myself to not being understood by a single one of the people on the other side of the wall; but I do not admit being thought comfortable in my solitude. I have not made myself comfortable, like M. Paul Claudel, for instance, who seems to me to have strengthened year by year the wall over which the proud banner of the Temple waves, but behind which he patiently cultivates the fat vegetables of his career as opulent official and company-director in Champagne.

"Oh, so you would have M. Paul Claudel be the man of his books: are you the man of yours? Are you Donissary the Country Priest, or Chantal?" I am not the man of my books, but I do not lie to my books; my life does not lie to my books; my life says nothing, it keeps quiet. If you were to force it to speak, it would tell pretty much the same story as your own life. I cannot

hold it up as an example to anybody. I believe the worst busy-bodies would find there no other lesson than that provided by a natural gift, I will not say for suffering fools gladly, but for seeing that they don't get away with their folly—for seeing that at least we come out quits. My life doesn't inconvenience my books; it keeps on knitting in its little corner, kicks back logs that fall out of the fire, makes sure the family pot is boiling, and tries not to cry till the day is over and everybody in bed. I can't stand the way M. Paul Claudel exhibits himself to the public in those austere works of his (heirs of some Romanesque cloister and the Jewish Temple and a Babylonian Palace), beribboned from waist up, bemedalled like a prize Choral Society's banner, pockets bulging with stocks and debentures and founder's shares.

* * *

"You have put me off So-and-so," wrote a young man I had never met the other day, "or rather you have wrenched me, very painfully, away from him, for I fought my way against you, I fought it, foot by foot." I shall not rebuff this stranger nor any of his like, any of those who have left for my sake houses much richer and more sheltered than mine is, worse luck! My house is not what they expect, but it is theirs, it is open-house! I am glad to have built my life so badly that it is as open to the public as a corn-mill. And if I may continue the comparison I will add that I am not sorry to have journeyed so far across the sea, because I have found in this country, if not the house of my dreams, at least the one that fits my life best, a house made for my life. There are no locks on the doors, no panes in the windows, no ceilings to the rooms; and the absence of ceilings allows one to discover a number of things one doesn't see in other houses—what ceiling-joists and gutters and girders really look like on the other side; the mottled pale-gold and faded rose of old tiles; the great patches of shadow daylight scarcely encroaches on, that seem to look still darker in our lamplight; the uneven wall-top where ghostly rats run—elsewhere we never see them: for some reason I cannot explain they respect our maize and manioc; the prodigious bats; and the enormous black cockchafers in their steel armour, yet so fragile that the tiniest drop of "fly-tox" sends them spinning to the ground stone-dead. Yes, as open houses go, this one is pretty well up to standard. It opens on to

country, which itself lies open, wide open, where the few fences are only barbed wire, on to a corridor four hundred leagues wide, a thousand long. Anyone who pleases can call on us, by whatever road he pleases: the ragged cowmen on their high saddles more ragged even than themselves with their harness of string, a spur strapped to one bare foot; the Bayanais with skin the colour of old leather; the wandering dust-coloured negroes; or the neighbour who has done forty miles on horseback to return a cow branded with our mark, and asks nothing in return but a plate of *fei jāo*. They arrive at dawn, in the evening, any time they like. There are always red beans boiling on the brick hearth; the big jars keep the clay-golden *rio* water fresh and cool. Between these passers-by and ourselves there is nothing, nothing but an earthen wall which from the setting of the sun to its rising again, through all its openings, large and small, breathes in the night air. We are in the hands of any passer-by, at his mercy. The unshod horses make no sound on the gravel. When bare feet approach, even watch-dogs are not roused. We are in the hands of passers-by as in the hands of God. Would that we also, myself and my books, could be always at the mercy of passers-by!

* * *

"Never," I once wrote (a long time ago), "never shall I grow weary of scandalizing fools." I understand now that I could only have meant this naïve challenge for myself. Either the sentence has no meaning, or it means only this: "I shall never grow weary of being scandalized, of sharing the scandal of fools." For truly theirs is the scandal I share; it is with them that I feel myself at one. My grievances would raise a smile amongst the fastidious. My idea of justice is that of the humblest peasant who has taken to heart his Sunday morning sermons. I share the scandal of fools; I am torn by the same contradictions; and the daily experience of seeing the fool unable to resolve them, far from humiliating me, inspires only a sly contempt for other forms of ignorance or acceptance, for the first elements of his wisdom. The fool pays perhaps no more attention than I do to certain manifestations of consecrated opportunism. He knows quite well that the ecclesiasts who approved the conquest of Abyssinia, winked at the Holy Week swoop on Tirana, and blessed the bombardment of

Barcelona and Guernica, are scarcely qualified to condemn the attack on Finland, stolen, anyhow, from Russia by the 1917 treaty. He knows that the individual vow of poverty taken by good religious stands in distressing contrast to the wealth and avarice of too many Congregations. The fool feels all this, and much else besides. He feels it keenly enough to suffer on account of it—if he had the power to suffer, or at least the power to suffer freely and for no return, as in love. He has lost this privilege. Still less has he the sense of irony reserved for the higher class of egoists. Caught in the pincer-grip of the splendour of the institution on the one hand, and the natural mediocrity of men on the other, the Christian has no choice but to become a saint, to escape into sanctity, or else to put up a fight against being crushed, that is, against despair. The fool has found another way: he outwits the scandal of down-at-heels devotion by joining the ranks of the devout; that of clericalism by himself becoming a clerical. He gets for his conformity the same return as the sceptic gets for his philosophic doubt: they both profess to be surprised at nothing in order to steer clear of having to be indignant at anything. Indignation is far from being a capitulation of the soul, like contempt; indignation is not the action of a selfish heart. Contempt springs from baseness; indignation must start from a certain loftiness, a certain height where one must maintain oneself at all costs, reserving, however, the right to blush at oneself. He who is indignant cannot escape the torturing constraint of self-examination, the outcome of which will always be to his own disadvantage; because indignation is nothing if not the spontaneous cry of a conscience outraged by scandal, yet unable to command strength enough to burn it all up by prayer and action, as the saints and heroes do. Had Our Lord not been indignant with the Pharisees, I should have been prepared to say that indignation is a sign of weakness; but there you are, we now know that the thing that cried out in us was unable to restrain its cry. We should be glad if this painful part of our nature kept silence by an exercise of will-power, but we do not want it to be inert and passive under the spur of lies. God grant that some day we may look on justice with an equally clear and pure gaze, ready to face it, but not to give in to it.

I know I am expressing all this very badly. "After all," the clever people will say, "what is Bernanos complaining about? That

he is not as foxy as we are? It is true that he is quite incredibly naïve. Does he think we are going to find a new job just to cure him of the vapours? When one is the embarrassed possessor of a voice that is so indiscreet that it has to shout every time someone pulls off a low-down trick, a sensible man makes up his mind to have the organ removed without delay; he could have learned from our example that it is no more indispensable to a man than the appendix or the gall-bladder. In any case a child of seven could have told him that it is the indiscretion of his unfortunate voice, and not the activities of blackguards, that won't let the poor fellow get to sleep. Let him resign himself, through obstinacy, if he likes, or stupidity. We shall not object to his voicing his lamentations in the company of those suffering from the same complaint; but it is too much to expect that we should find it any fun when our fools are picked on to be the victims of an infirmity that plays such havoc with M. Bernanos' own nerves. We must ensure that while profiting by our little schemes the good fellows' consciences come to no harm. What, after all, does he object to? We did not invent fools. It would be scarcely fair even to say that we have selectively bred a family of fools who, but for us, would have remained unknown and would never have attained any distinction in the inner circle of the species. What more does he want? We shall answer to the Lord for our own lies; and if on that occasion a certain number of our fools, led astray by the creator of *Mouchette*, accuse us of having deceived them, we shall reply to God: 'Excuse us, Lord, but remember what a help mental restrictions, distinctions, and the blind-eye technique were to the Church at the very time when they were keeping the blockheads quiet, blockheads like those who are accusing us now, and giving M. Bernanos credit for not having allowed them to sleep in peace.'"

All that would be true, truly true, true as Clement Vautel, if the fool were what the clever folk think he is, that is, if he were a man himself not clever. I claim that he is nothing of the kind; or rather that it is I who belong to the class of inoffensive fools, though in my case God has bestowed the gift of speech. The almost entirely physical distress, the suffocation I feel at the sight of certain manifestations of cynicism which the world commonly looks upon with an indulgent eye, that, if you like, is a fool's reaction, a sort of turning back on oneself, a disguised refusal

to understand. But the real fool is recognized by this, that the second time a test of that sort comes his way, he is more proof against it, more hardened, thicker-skinned. He takes the blow in silence, saving up what little judgment he has as a boxer saves his wind. He is not even sure he is being hit; he feels rather as if he has run into a wall. He feels no indignation against those who hit him, since, to be sure, the blows were not meant for him. He makes his way amongst lies and hypocrisies like a peasant in Paris, jostled by the passers-by and still learning the art of walking in city streets. I do not say the fool's silence is stoical, but still, it is not so cowardly as is thought. The fool hates to speak of what scandalizes him: that is a forbidden topic, a secret, progressive initiation whose experiences are best left unnoticed, for fear of raising a laugh amongst the knowing ones. In a word, when one is born credulous, or even a born mug, one does not talk about certain disillusionments any more than one talks of one's sexual experiences.

Yes, every time I write the word "fool" I reflect sadly how fools, by a naïve self-defensive reflex, in order to escape the suspicion of belonging to that despised class, always do their utmost to give the word a bad meaning. Consequently, the reference I have just made to the strange shame which holds them back from admitting their revulsions of conscience, and delivers them into the hands of sponging cynics, will probably not be understood. It will be thought I am ridiculing a sentiment so universal that it ought rather to inspire in us a sort of religious awe, coming as it does from the distant ages, and bearing witness against us in what abandonment, century after century, the less gifted of our race have been left. There is a standing conspiracy between the shameless exploiters and the cowards, who, not being able actually to approve, assist at the spectacle with a dignified and aloof air, as though they were watching a game of which they did not know the rules. That reminds me of an incident I read in some newspaper or other. One Sunday not long ago, behind the fence of a builders' yard on one of the most frequented streets of Paris, three hooligans violated a small girl after first trying to strangle her. When respectable passers-by were questioned by the police, they replied simply, "We thought it was some young people having a bit of fun." I often dream about this fools' modesty, but unfortunately no one wants to

dream about it with me. You see, it's so nice to be able to say, "Human nature doesn't change"; that recommends you so much to the ladies at tea-time. However true it may be that human nature does not change, to keep on jabbing human nature on the same spot is a dangerous proceeding: man's delicately adjusted nervous mechanism is liable to short-circuit. The masters of this world evidently profit greatly by this fools' modesty, but they are wrong in thinking it is as natural a feeling as that which raises a blush on the cheek of *la douce Virginie*. She blushes out of ignorance: the fool says nothing because he knows only too well what the masters of this world are up to. The little Breton peasant girl, of a respectable family, but forced by poverty to "go into service," as they say, may, as a villager, have had illusions about the gravity of certain bald gentlemen in their fifties. After a number of them have slipped quietly into her room late at night on the pretext of giving her fatherly advice about the temptations of Paris, she will no longer have many illusions; but she will be all the less ready to speak about certain delicate subjects, out of self-interest, if not out of virtue. "She is a good girl, sure enough," the bald gentlemen whisper to one another, "discreet as the grave." But the day comes when she joins the profession openly and with complete cynicism turns the tables on the bald gentlemen with a vengeance. The masters of this world ought to mistrust Bécassine precisely because she is silent. Far from allowing herself any thoughtless familiarities with the Master when Madame is about, she becomes more and more the perfect servant. Madame is delighted. "This girl is shaping well, quite definitely," she decides. The respect of fools for the authorities is far from being the good sign the orthodox imagine.

That the world's masters should be reduced, by the all-powerfulness of informers, to having to explain their private lives, is a fact of immense significance; yet you think you see in it only an oddity of manners which everybody will get used to sooner or later. It is an oddity which I call a revolution. "It dates from the advent of the parliamentary system," you say. On the contrary, the fiction of universal suffrage was a compromise solution, the last effort of an authority stripped of all religious character, and even of any real right to lose itself in anonymity. The experiment failed. Principles no longer protect the masters

of the world, since the masters of the world claim to entrench themselves behind principles without believing them. Do you think it has always been the same, more or less? Very well: we will simply say then that the masters of the world have too much abused the extraordinary tolerance of principles. Slowly but surely, with a pressure like that of delivery, the masters are thrust forth by the principles. You may well desire to restore the principle of authority, my dear friends, my dear technicians. Unfortunately the protective membrane, the alimentary duct, are suffering from too serious lesions; they are too ulcerated. To effect a cure, the first requisite is to draw off what is within the diseased system—need I say what? We know furthermore that the excellence of the principle has to supply for the mediocrity of men; and society has been very right in turning this law of its nature to the best possible account. For all that, it remains true that modern life makes this substitution of the principle for the man who represents it more and more difficult and precarious. So much the better. One was well on the way to believing that principles were made for men, and not men for principles. "Strengthen the principle," cry the paradox-mongers in chorus. But in strengthening the principle you risk much more the further stimulation of the contractions by which the organ is trying to cast out the poisonous product that is consuming its substance. If the world still tolerates its masters, it is because the name of master no longer calls up in their minds any but a vague and inconsistent idea. In a word, those who boast that they stand for the restoration of the principle of authority as well as for the maintenance of established power, are in my view nothing but the most precious blockheaded impostors. Modern society has not much to hope for from the restoration of the idea of justice: but it has everything to fear from the restoration of the idea of authority. When the idea of authority is restored, modern society will be dead.

I write this with my customary roughshod outspokenness, for, when all is said and done, Christian honour is no less dear to me than it is to you; I am bound to it by the same ties as you are; I shall share its fate willy-nilly; I shall not survive it any longer than you do. And precisely because I am only a poor beggar, it may be that I see the blows coming sooner. I am used to blows; nobody bothers about me. Nothing protects me from scandal;

I have no honours to keep me warm; my sense of responsibility does not protect me, either, or the admiration of my fellow-men, nor even—believe it or not—the opinion I have of myself and of my life. I am naked in the face of scandal, as naked as you and I shall be before the just judge, naked as a worm. That is why it is that I can tell sooner than you when the wind is veering to the north. When my teeth begin to chatter be ready; it will probably snow tomorrow.

(*To be concluded*)

REVIEW

PIONEER! O PIONEER!

Prince of Darkness. By J. F. Powers. (John Lehmann. 9s. 6d.)

"**H**ERE is a selection of stories," writes Mr. Lehmann, the publisher, "that will delight those who are weary both of the tough background and the sentimental approach so characteristic of much modern fiction."

"Boom!" writes Mr. Powers, the author thus commended. "Clyde hits Banjo twice in the chin and mouth quick and drops him like a handkerchief. Banjo is all over the floor and his mouth is hanging open like a spring is busted and blood is leaking out the one side and he has got some bridgework loose."

"'Hand me the nine, Roy,' Clyde says to me. I get the nine ball and give it to Clyde. He shoves it way into Banjo's mouth that is hanging open and bleeding good."

"Then Clyde lets him have one more across the jaw and you can hear the nine ball rattle inside Banjo's mouth."

One is curious to know what Mr. Lehmann keeps under the counter for those who are *not* "weary of the tough background." Indeed Mr. Lehmann seems, with singular fatuity, to have picked out for praise the only two serious defects in Mr. Powers's art. For this otherwise admirable young writer is sentimental also—unexceptionally—in his gentle account of the death of an old friar in "Lions, harts, leaping does"; less agreeably in "The Old Bird; a love story." The shadows of Hemingway and Steinbeck lie over the work but not so heavily as to obscure the brilliant and determining quality which Mr. Lehmann

does not choose to notice. The book is Catholic. Mr. Powers has a full philosophy with which to oppose the follies of his age and nation.

This is very much more remarkable in the U.S.A. than in Europe. Here, what is infelicitously dubbed "the Catholic Intellectual" is a commonplace; there he is scarcely known. Indeed the nation has a dismal record of "intellectual" apostasies. In England we should be somewhat disconcerted to see a man described as a "leading Baptist novelist" or a "notable recruit to the younger school of Presbyterian poets." In rather the same way Americans know the Catholic Church for countless solid virtues but not as the parent or nurse of the Arts. Many American Catholics are becoming aware of this anomaly and discuss it freely and anxiously. This is not the place to examine it, but merely to note that Mr. Powers's position is lonely. Fr. Thomas Merton's Trappist calling removes him from the general traffic of literary life; Mr. Harry Sylvester betrays at moments an all too fierce impatience with the restraints of orthodoxy; Mr. Powers is almost unique in his country as a lay writer who is at ease in the Church; whose whole art, moreover, is everywhere infused and directed by his Faith.

This is not to say either that he is a propagandist or that he here deals, like Bernanos, with high supernatural problems. He is concerned with the natural order as a pure story-teller; matter and manner are topical and local; base-ball, jazz, the negro-problem, usury, the search for a living, the daily round of the presbytery—these are his subjects but all are seen in true perspective. Man has a purpose and a proper place in creation in Mr. Powers's stories as he has not in those which superficially resemble them—the *New Yorker* school. It is perhaps the tales of the presbytery which will most delight the English reader as being at the same time the most novel and the most intelligible. Here we see the Middle-West Irish priest—chaste, philistine, prosaic, energetic in youth, run rather to fat in age—who provides the strength and the limitations of the American Church.

The most remarkable of these stories is the one which gives its name to the book. "Prince of Darkness" is a magnificent study of sloth—a sin which has not attracted much attention of late and which, perhaps, is the besetting sin of the age. Catholic novelists have dealt at length with lust, blasphemy, cruelty and greed—these provide obvious dramatic possibilities. We have been inclined to wink at sloth; even, in a world of go-getters, almost to praise it. An imaginative writer has advantages over the preacher and Mr. Powers exposes this almost forgotten, widely practised, capital sin, in a way which brought an alarming whiff of brimstone to the nostrils of at least one reader.

EVELYN WAUGH.





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